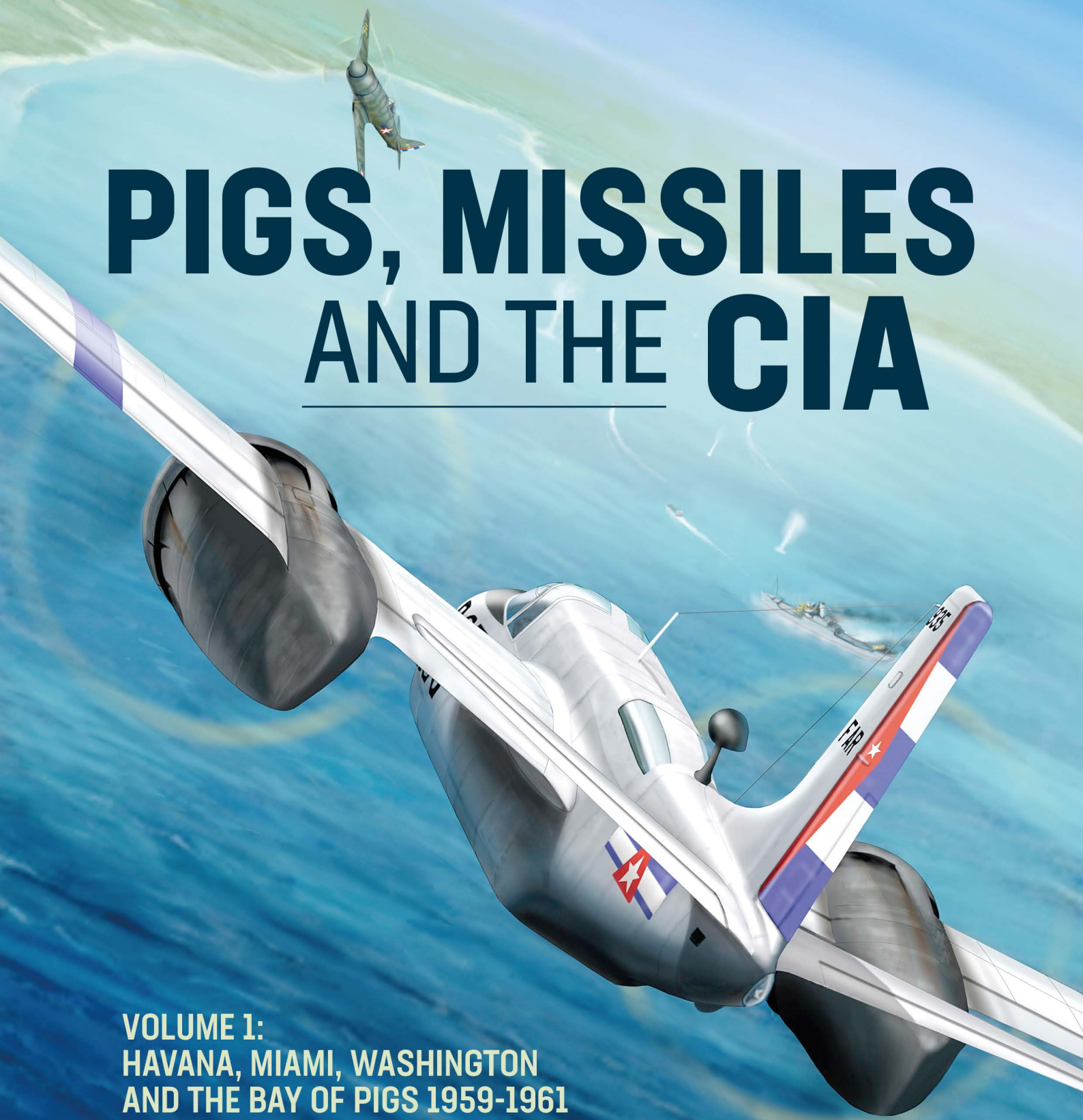
– LATIN AMERICA@WAR 25 –

PIGS, MISSILES AND THE CIA



VOLUME 1: HAVANA, MIAMI, WASHINGTON AND THE BAY OF PIGS 1959-1961

LINDA RIOS BROMLEY

LATIN AMERICA@WAR SERIES

Helion & Company Limited
Unit 8 Amherst Business Centre
Budbrooke Road
Warwick
CV34 5WE
England
Tel. 01926 499 619
Email: info@helion.co.uk
Website: www.helion.co.uk
Twitter: @helionbooks
Visit our blog http://blog.helion.co.uk/

Published by Helion & Company 2021
Designed and typeset by Farr out Publications, Wokingham, Berkshire
Cover designed by Paul Hewitt, Battlefield Design (www.battlefield-design.co.uk)

Text © Linda Rios Bromley 2021
Illustrations © as individually credited
Colour artworks © David Bocquelet, Tom Cooper and Goran Sudar 2021
Maps © Tom Cooper 2021

Front cover painting: Air combats during the CIA-arranged invasion in the Bay of Pigs reached their peak in the morning of 16 April 1961, when a pair of Douglas B-26B Invaders of Chico flight appeared on the scene just as the ships of Brigade 2506 came under attack by two Sea Fury fighter-bombers of the Fuerza Aérea Revolucionaria. Flying the B-26B Chico 1, which displayed the fake serial 'FAR935', Captain Mario Zuniga attacked the Sea Fury piloted by Carreras Rolas only seconds after the latter conducted a diving attack on the SS *Rio Escondido*, hitting the deck full of fuel drums. Few of Zuniga's bullets damaged Rolas' engine, but the latter managed to return to the base. (Painting by Pablo Albornoz)

Every reasonable effort has been made to trace copyright holders and to obtain their permission for the use of copyright material. The author and publisher apologise for any errors or omissions in this work, and would be grateful if notified of any corrections that should be incorporated in future reprints or editions of this book.

ISBN 978-1-915113-45-0

British Library Cataloguing-in-Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form, or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without the express written consent of Helion & Company Limited.

We always welcome receiving book proposals from prospective authors.

CONTENTS

Dedication 2
Abbreviations 2

1 Cuba before Castro 2
2 Making a Dictator 5
3 Trading One Dictator For Another 16
4 The Leaders 20
5 Cuba in Turmoil 21
6 The Plan 23
7 Exiles In Training 31
8 Plan B 32
9 Start of the Invasion 36
10 The Last Stand 56
11 The End … Almost 58

Bibliography 62
Notes 62
About the Author 64

Dedication

Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.
—John 15:13

This narrative is dedicated to the resilient, courageous and spirited people of Cuba. Through the decades, they have survived dictators, disasters and tragedies to stand sturdy and resilient. It is a testament to their strong will carried through generations. Viva Cuba!
—Linda Bromley

ABBREVIATIONS

ASNE	American Society of Newspaper Editors
CDR	Committees for the Defense of the Revolution
CFC	Cuban Families Committee
CIA	Central Intelligence Agency
CRC	Cuban Revolutionary Council
FAEC	*Fuerza Aerea Ejercito de Cuba*, Cuban Army Air Force
FAR	*Fuerza Aerea Revolucionaria*, Cuban Revolutionary Air Force
JCS	Joint Chiefs of Staff
LCI	Landing Craft, Infantry
LCM	Landing Craft, Mechanized
LCVP	Landing Craft, Vehicle and Personnel
LSD	Landing Ship Dock

1

CUBA BEFORE CASTRO

As early as 1511, a Cuban revolution began when Taino Indians led by Hatuey took up arms against Spanish colonizers. Declared the first rebel of America, Hatuey memorialized with a statue in downtown Havana, proclaims a long tradition of struggle on the island leading up to 1959. Prior to 1492 estimates of the indigenous population on the island reached near 500,000. However, military conquest, enslavement and disease wiped out a significant portion of the natives. The Spanish adopted many Taino words in use today, such as hurricane, barbecue and canoe.

The Spanish expanded their reach into Mexico and Peru and confiscated gold and silver mined in those areas. Due to the favorable weather conditions and availability of labor, British, French, Dutch and Danish established sugar plantations on nearby islands. St. Domenigue, the world's largest sugar producer, assumed the Taino name, Haiti. After revolutions in Spain, United States and Haiti, independence came to each country. Spain then turned its focus on the Caribbean, primarily the largest island, Cuba.

Over one million slaves from Africa, brought to Cuba in less than a century, continued to be transported to the island until slavery was abolished in 1886. The presence of Africans meant their languages, religion and culture remained into 20th century Cuba. Investors from the US, such as Hershey and United Fruit Company, controlled sugar production in the late 1800s. By the early 1900s migrant workers came to Cuba from Haiti and Jamaica. Even European refugees fleeing the Nazis and Spanish Civil War came to Cuba between 1936 – 1939.

Cuba's history has been an intense, complex and continuous state of transition. Plantation owner Carlos Manuel de Cespedes freed his slaves in 1868 and encouraged them to join him in the fight for Cuba's independence. Jose Antonio de la Caridad Maceo y Grajales, a mixed-race son of a Venzuelan farmer, served as second-in-command of the Cuban Army of Independence. The nickname *El Titan de Bronse* (The Bronze Titan) was bestowed by his soldiers after Maceo sustained injuries several times in battle. Spaniards referred to Maceo as *El Leon Mayor* (The Greater Lion). Maceo became one of the greatest guerrilla leaders in 19th century Latin America. Mariana Grajales, a free Afro-Cuban woman, remembered as "The Mother of Cuba," tirelessly went to the battlefields and nursed both Cuban and Spanish soldiers. Together with Jose Marti, Cespedes and Maceo, she represented the diversity of the independence movement.

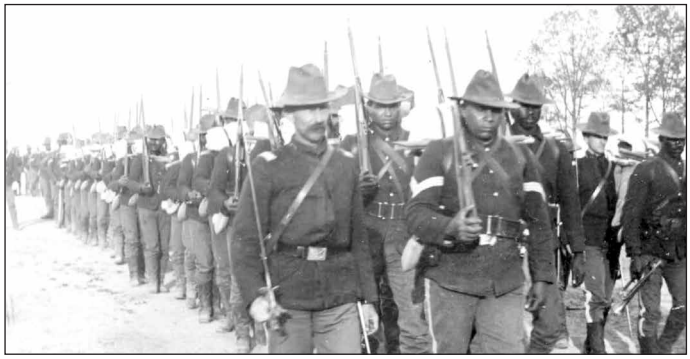
Cuba's independence was largely shaped by the US. The Monroe Doctrine detailed US intentions to oversee and monitor the hemisphere.[1] Jose Julian Marti Perez, a poet, philosopher, essayist, journalist, professor and publisher, considered a national hero for his role in the liberation from Spain, authored essays of opposite thoughts. He warned of the US threat against "Our America," referring to Latin America, and opposed the US disdain for its attitude toward Indians. Marti has been referred to as the "Apostle of Cuban Independence." He was politically active and supported independence through his political writing and activity. Marti began his dedication to the promotion of liberty and political independence for Cuba as early as his adolescence.

Marti traveled extensively in Spain, Latin America and the United States raising awareness for Cuban independence. He promoted unification of Cuban exiles in Florida for the success of the Cuban War of Independence. He was a key figure in the planning and execution of the war as well as developing the Cuban Revolutionary Party.

Despite that attitude, the Cuban mindset toward the US was mixed. White Cubans saw the US as their beacon to freedom. At the same time, it was possible for many to see Cuba as independent of Spain. Many Cuban emigres, including Marti, strongly supported

Rear Admiral Winfield Scott Schley commanded the Flying Squadron in the battle of Santiago de Cuba which destroyed the Spanish fleet. (Albert Grandolini Collection)

Teddy Roosevelt's Rough Riders en route to Cuba by naval vessel. (Albert Grandolini Collection)



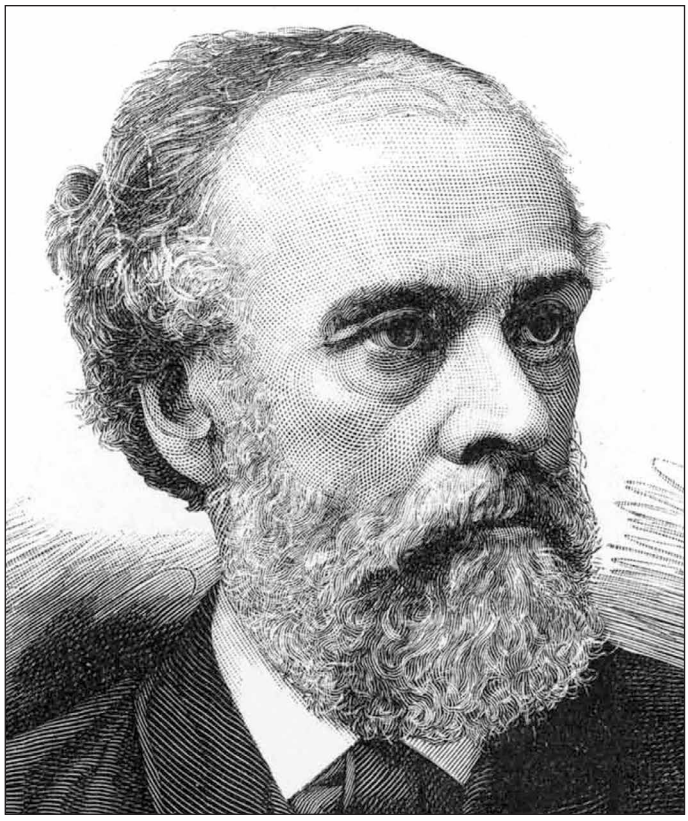
Incoming soldiers marching to battle. (Albert Grandolini Collection)

independence. US President McKinley announced "ties of singular intimacy" between the US and Cuba. However, the US then invaded the island in 1898 and occupied it for the next four years. At the end of the occupation, the US left in place the Platt Amendment which gave the US control over Cuba's foreign and economic policies, the right to protect US interests and property in Cuba and the right to develop coal and naval stations on the island.[2] The US then established Guantanamo Bay Naval Station which still operates on the island today.

Cuba's relationship with the US shaped its culture, economy, politics and national identity. After 1902, the island referred to the period as "pseudo republic". Post-independence developments restored much of the earlier white supremacy and plantation owners, while Cuba and the US re-established the labor force.

One independence fighter, Juan Gualberto Gomez – an Afro-Cuban revolutionary leader in the war against Spain – became a

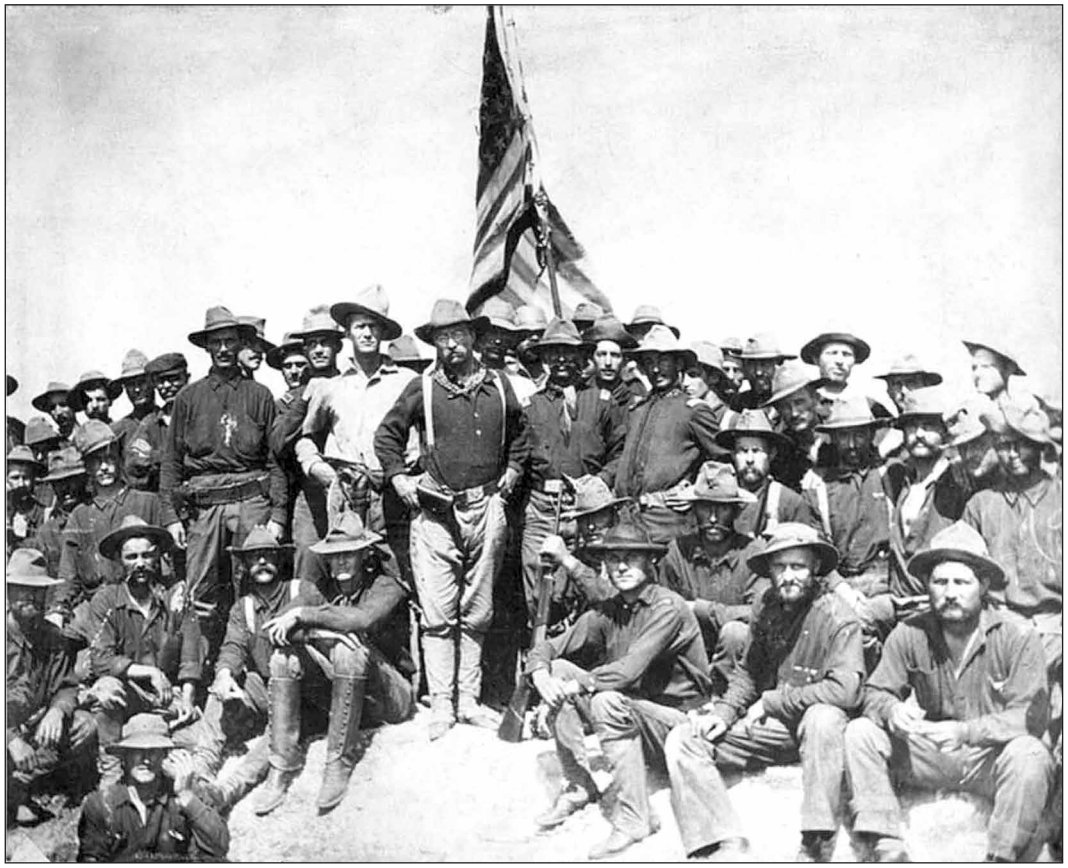
One month after the outbreak of the Spanish American War, in May 1898, a Spanish fleet docked in the harbor at Santiago de Cuba. The superior US naval forces arrived and blockaded the harbor. US Army Fifth Corps landed in Cuba in June and launched a land and sea attack in Santiago. Included in the ground troops were Teddy Roosevelt's Rough Riders, officially designated as the 1st US Volunteer Calvary. (Albert Grandolini Collection)



The Platt Amendment, named for Orville Hitchcock Platt, who was responsible for drafting the document which allowed US control over Cuba's foreign and economic policies. (Albert Grandolini Collection)

Ships docked in Tampa Bay as passengers wait to board for the voyage to Cuba. (Albert Grandolini Collection)

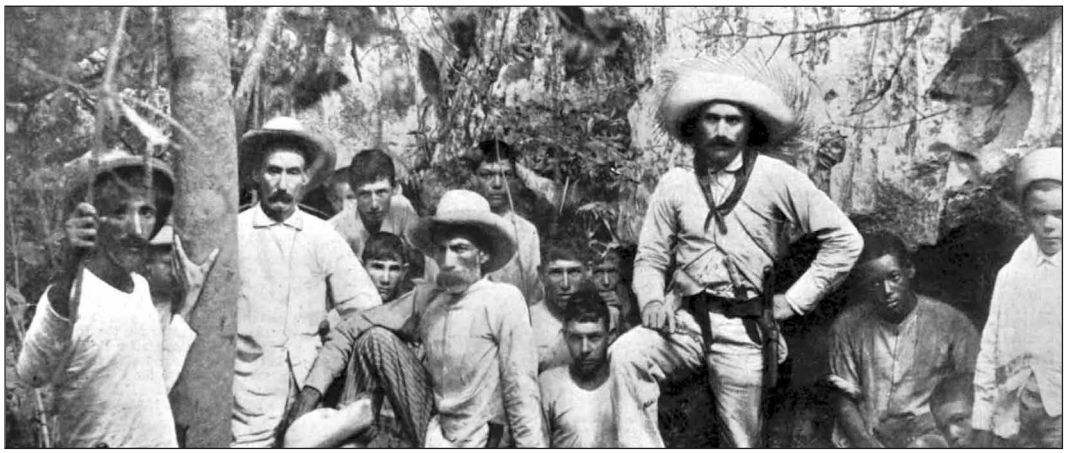
collaborator of Jose Marti. Together the two leaders planned the uprising to unite the island's black population behind the revolution. Gomez supported education and self-improvement for blacks to overcome racial inequality. Another school of thought supported the formation of the Independent Party of Color to promote black citizens' interests. However, a wave of military violence against blacks ended political organization for many years. Despite racial prejudices and inequities following independence, white politicians had to open mainstream political parties to blacks. Racial discrimination was outlawed throughout the country, including at voting polls. However, racial inequality and racism continued in some institutions. Immigration of Haitians and Jamaicans to US-owned sugar plantations added another level to the already complex national and racial picture. White Cubans argued the incoming Haitians and Jamaicans threatened the existing racial balance.



Rough Riders gathered with the US flag. (Albert Grandolini Collection)

Foreign capital and products poured into Cuba after independence, but the explosion did not last long. Independence from Spain did not bring the economic prosperity expected by most Cubans. The sugar boom displaced small farmers and provided only meager wages. Without land to work, farmers and unskilled laborers flocked to cities ill-prepared to support them. With only a few manufacturing businesses, casual employment such as day labor, was the only work available. US companies assumed control of much of Cuba's economy. Investors from the US controlled 90 percent

Drawing of Spanish General Jose Toral y Velazquez, surrendering. (Albert Grandolini Collection)



A group of Cuban revolutionaries join to fight dictator Batista. (Albert Grandolini Collection)

of the tobacco industry, copper, iron and nickel mining, railroads, electricity and telephone organizations.

Political and economic turmoil characterized the first half of the 20th century. Prices for sugar were high and the economy boomed. In 1921 prices and demand crashed and led to banks' collapse, the precursor of the Great Depression. Corruption and widespread poverty struck the country as by-products of foreign domination. Low-level government officials supplemented their meager wages by accepting graft and under-the-table cash payments. Many business owners had to "take care" of public officials with bribe money in order to operate successfully.

In the 1920s and 1930s, black Cuban intellectuals looked north to the Harlem renaissance in New York and embraced the cultural life. White Cuban intellectuals were influenced by the black thought. US imperialism in Cuba, white supremacy in the US and Cuba's history of racial inequality became deeply interwoven.

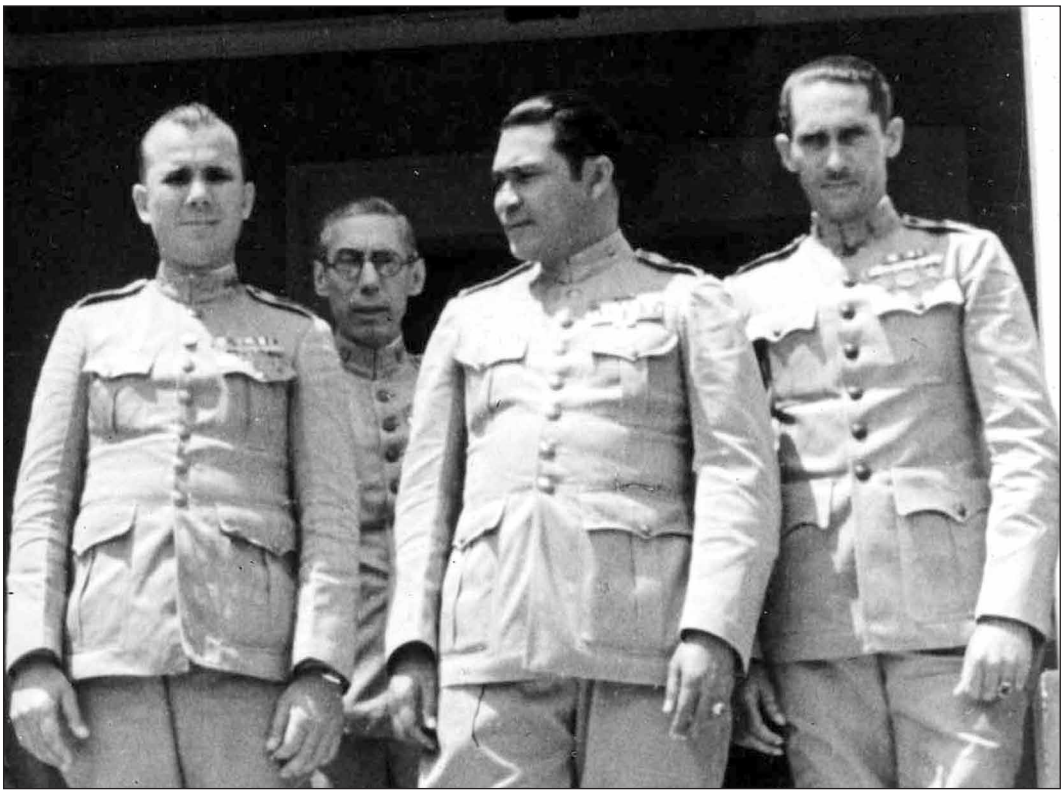
2

MAKING A DICTATOR

Angel Castro y Argiz, born to a peasant family in northwest Spain, and conscripted into the Spanish Army fought in the Cuban War of Independence and Spanish American War of 1898. When the war ended, he remained in Cuba and searched for employment. After working jobs of short duration, Angel established a business growing sugar cane in Biran, Oriente Province. Although married to Maria Luisa Argota Reyes in 1911, Angel began a relationship with Lina Ruz Gonzalez, a household servant 27 years younger and of Canarian descent. Lina and Angel's third child, Fidel, was born on the farm on 13 August 1926. Rather than taking his father's name, Fidel was given his mother's surname of Ruz because of the stigma of illegitimacy. Lina and Angel had three sons and four daughters before legally marrying in 1943.

When Fidel was six years old, together with siblings Roman and Angela, he was sent to live with their teacher in Santiago de Cuba. It is uncertain why Angel sent them to that teacher. The accommodations at the teacher's residence were cramped, and they lived in relative poverty with barely enough for all to eat. At age eight, Fidel was baptized into the Catholic Church, the predominant religion in the country. He was then entitled to attend the La Salle boarding school in Santiago. However, due to his regular misbehavior, he was sent to the privately funded Jesuit Dolores School in Havana. Fidel took interest in history, geography and debating, but did not excel academically. While at school, he spent much of his time playing sports.

In 1945, Fidel enrolled at the University of Havana to study law, where he became involved in the student protest movement against regimes of Presidents Gerardo Machado, Roman Grau and Fulgencio Batista. Fidel became passionate about anti-imperialism and opposed US intervention in the Caribbean. He joined the University Committee for the Independence of Puerto Rico and the Committee for Democracy in the Dominican Republic that



Fulgencio Batista surrounded by some of his army leaders. (Albert Grandolini Collection)

supported exiles to overthrow General Rafael Trujillo. Castro even launched an unsuccessful campaign as president of the Federation of University Students, emphasizing his opposition to corruption. Fidel graduated in September 1950 with a Doctor of Law degree.

With two fellow leftists, Jorge Azpiazu and Rafael Resendez, Fidel established a legal practice which focused on helping poverty-stricken Cubans exercise their rights. However, the business resulted in a huge failure. Fidel failed to pay his expenses, furniture re-possessed and electricity turned off. He then focused on protests of western involvement in the Korean War as an active member of the Cuban Peace Committee. He visualized himself as the heir to Eduardo Chibas and the Partido Ortodoxo. Chibas' administration was short-lived after he failed to substantiate allegations that a minister had misappropriated government funds to buy a ranch in Guatemala. Ostracized for the allegations, Chibas subsequently shot himself during an on-air radio broadcast and died a short time later. He continued to be honored as a patriot.

Cuban citizens view incoming soldiers while flags fly from the balconies. (Albert Grandolini Collection)

Fidel wanted to run for Congress in June 1952; however, senior members of Ortodoxo refused to nominate him because they feared his profound radical reputation would adversely impact their organization. He was subsequently nominated as a candidate for the House of Representatives primarily by party members of Cuba's poorest districts.

During his campaign, Castro met with General Fulgencio Batista, the former president who had returned to politics with the Unitary Action Party. In March 1952 Batista seized power in a military coup and declared himself president. He cancelled planned presidential elections and declared his new platform as "disciplined democracy." Castro considered it a one-man dictatorship. Batista solidified ties with Cuba's wealthy elite and the US. Additionally, he cut diplomatic relations with the Soviet Union, suppressed trade unions and socialist groups. Castro and

his supporters brought several legal cases against Batista and his regime. They argued Batista had committed criminal acts to warrant imprisonment. Additionally, they argued some ministers breached the labor laws. The lawsuits were dismissed at which time Fidel began considering ways to overthrow the Batista government.

Like other Communist countries, Cuba's Communist Party emerged from the labor movement. By the 1930s, the Communist Party had expanded to rural areas and organized agriculture workers and peasants. The Cuban Communist Party became one of the largest and strongest in all Latin America. The Great Depression hit the economy, already dependent on the export of sugar, with widespread impact. Protests and complaints fell on deaf ears of the corrupt government. By the 1930s, direct action for change came with armed rebellion by farm and urban workers, students and intellectuals. The target of much of the discontent was corruption of President Gerardo Machado's government. Even the US saw Machado as a liability and sought to have him removed. Negotiations between US Ambassador Sumner Wells and Cuban military leaders achieved the desired result.[1] Carlos Manuel de Cespedes y Quesada replaced Machado in 1933. However, de Cespedes' administration only lasted one month; he was overthrown by a group of students who installed a committee of radicals at the helm, and Roman Grau San Martin became president.

Official portrait of Fulgencio Batista. (Albert Grandolini Collection)

Grau San Martin's government quickly proceeded to implement a series of social, political and labor reforms. This was the first government formed without sanction of the US. However, the new Cuban government implemented pro-labor policies that mirrored the New Deal in the US, raising wages, implementing an eight-hour workday and creating a program for workers' compensation in the event of illness or injury. The changes challenged US interests and investors on the island. The new government cut rates on US-owned utility companies. Workers seized the sugar plantations where they worked. The US then concluded the new government too radical to work with. US Ambassador Wells, with concurrence from leadership in Washington, DC, sought out the Cuban Army for assistance.

Batista out with his family. (Albert Grandolini Collection)

The 1933 revolt against de Cespedes had been initiated by Sergeant Fulgencio Batista. Cuban President Grau San Martin immediately promoted Batista to colonel in command of the entire army. Ambassador Sumner Wells cultivated Batista's alliance and suggested "the very great majority of commercial and financial interests in Cuba who were looking for protection could only find such protection in Batista." Wells also planted the idea the US would "look approvingly on an overthrow of the revolutionary government." In January 1934 Wells' suggestion became reality and the US immediately recognized the new Cuban government. Batista remained a power-maker until 1959.

Batista made peace with Cuba's Communist Party and subsequently invited two Communist leaders, Juan Marinello and Carlos Rafael Rodriguez, to serve in his cabinet. The new president in 1940 called upon a wide network of his country's political leaders

M8 scout cars of Batista's army on parade. (Albert Grandolini Collection)

A locally improvised armored truck of Batista's army. In addition to being used in combat, they were also used for transporting prisoners. (Albert Grandolini Collection)

to draft a new constitution. However, none of the groups' members had experience in developing governing documents. With no provision for enforcement of the new constitution, it became just another useless piece of paper.

Batista was voted out in 1944 when the Autentico Party won elections. However, the elections did nothing to change the existing situation. Embezzlement, graft and corruption permeated every level of the government. In 1952 Batista led a second coup with little opposition. The second Batista government had no workable plan for Cuba's many economic problems. Dependence on only the sugar crop resulted in political and economic subordination to the US which rapidly increased poverty.

The new government declared the Communist Party illegal in 1953. Control of the Cuban labor movement was then assumed by pro-government leaders. Afro-Cuban organizations also followed suit. Black social clubs and organizations represented a large portion of the country's poor and mostly controlled by the Batista government. The president himself was of mixed-race. His opponents attacked him with labels "*El Mulato Malo*" (The Bad Mixed One) and the "Black Beast".

Three quarters of Cuba's available land produced sugar, 80 percent of which was exported. US-owned companies controlled 40 percent of the farms and 80 percent of the mills. Large portions of banking, livestock, mining, petroleum and tourism were also controlled by the US. With help from the US agriculture sources, improvement in the sugar harvest reduced the time from 10 months to as little as 3 months. In the 1950s seasonal employment then skyrocketed. Once the harvest had been completed, however, unemployment once again escalated.

Expansion of US-dominated sugar plantations into eastern Cuba increased the numbers of impoverished citizens. Rural poverty not only was a lack of money, but also lack of jobs, social services and most especially education. Eastern Cuba initiated the wars of independence and expanded the number of supporters.

A huge contrast existed in Cuba in the 1950s that further separated the population. The rural poor included landless workers and those with only small plots who made up the 1.5 million jobless. At the same time 3.5 million Cubans struggled to feed their families. The proximity to the US meant much of the goods available to Cubans were imported from there. Cubans worked for miniscule wages and had none of the social services available to US citizens. These impoverished citizens barely survived on rice, beans and sugar water. Naked children, their bellies swollen from malnourishment, suffered from diseases. A majority of the Cuban population lived in rural areas under destitute conditions. Many lived in shacks with bare earth floor and only a kerosene lamp for lighting. Very few had basics like milk and eggs, and rarely ate meat. Their diet resulted in diseases and illness.

The upper classes of the population resided mostly in and around Havana. Their lifestyles contrasted drastically with those of the general population. These groups enjoyed access to education, health care and other urban amenities. The affluent citizens ate a varied diet including hot dogs, hamburgers, pancakes, fried chicken and even ice cream, food many Cubans would never taste in their lifetimes.

On the other side of the spectrum, 900,000 of the wealthiest Cubans controlled 43 percent of the country's income. Affluent citizens who possessed skills, education and contacts left the country. Many had financial resources to relocate to the US or Europe. As many as 3,000 trained doctors emigrated after the revolution. With this huge loss, the economy suffered greatly. Private schools closed in favor of a study of vocational and technical education. The government decreed urban high school students relocate to rural boarding schools where they attended classroom training to learn farm labor.

Batista's supporters hailed from Cuba's plantation owners and power brokers. Havana's wealthy citizens lived in gated multi-storied mansions within Miramar community where they had little or no exposure to the other side of the city's population. Miramar residents enjoyed air conditioning in the hottest season, luxurious furnishings from Europe, while cared for by servants, cooks and gardeners. They socialized with others of their circle at dinner parties and fancy balls. The families traveled to Miami, New York and Europe to shop and dine in elegant restaurants.

Nightclubs, casinos and brothels in 1950s Havana were controlled by the Mafia organization in the US. Cuban prostitutes reportedly also worked at the US Naval Base Guantanamo Bay. For white males traveling to the island, a visit to a mixed-race prostitute was an exciting activity. The city's Plaza del Vapor served as a massive prostitution marketplace for both female and male services.

The country was ripe for revolution.

Fidel Castro brought a small group of Ortodoxos together who decided to organize a more effective plan against Batista than simply protests. The Movement, as the group became known,

Navy personnel parade through a town during Batista's era. (Albert Grandolini Collection)

counted among its members, Abel Santamaria and his sister Haydee Santamaria. Their small apartment became a gathering place for the group. Jesus Montane, a manager at General Motors, soon joined the Movement.

Fidel demanded total commitment of all members: No consumption of alcohol, simple lifestyle and total dedication to the overthrow of Batista. Melba Hernandez, though older than Castro, became intrigued with his soft voice. She introduced another member of the group, Raul Gomez. Haydee Santamaria brought her fiancé, Boris Luis Santa Coloma. A printer by occupation, Nico Lopez, became a valued member of the team. The leadership of the Movement in addition to Castro, became the Santamaria siblings, Melba Hernandez and Castro's sister, Lidia. The leadership also used Lidia's apartment for meetings. By July 1952, approximately 1,200 recruits had joined the Movement from the ranks of waiters, shop keepers, mechanics, truck drivers and other impoverished citizens. Very few university students joined the Movement.

With a cheap second-hand copy machine, Castro wrote and produced news sheets under the name, Alejandro. Dr Mario Munoz of Colon joined the Movement as an enthusiastic revolutionary and ham radio operator. Another valuable recruit, Pedro Miret, an engineering student and arms expert, owned a small cache of rifles and shotguns. Miret had been designated as the Movement's military committee leader.

Miret trained recruits to dismantle and reassemble rifles and shotguns using his own weapons. Oscar Alcalde, a member of the Finance Ministry and member of the hunting club, had invited guests (other recruits) to practice shooting at the club.

A serious issue of the Movement continued to be financial problems. None of the recruits had any personal wealth that could be contributed to the Movement. Several members of the group did what they could to raise money, mortgaged their personal property and sold possessions. Fidel could have earned income if he had practiced his vocation as a lawyer. Though Castro had a few pesos donated to the organization, the electricity at the home he shared with his wife and son had been suspended and there had been no money for his son's medicine. It became obvious Castro's family ranked second to his devotion to the Movement.

Another radical group competing with the Movement was the National Revolutionary Movement (MNR) led by university professor Rafael Garcia Barcena, co-founder of the Ortodoxo party. MNR, unlike the Movement, counted professionals and students among its ranks.

A former leader of the Ortodoxo, Max Lesnick, leaked a potential plan of action against Batista, and he had a good supply of weapons. Hearing this, Castro felt pressured to move his own plans forward soon. His plan had been to attack the Moncada military barracks at Santiago in Oriente province, and at the same time, launch an attack on the smaller military post at Bayamo. Castro told only five other members of the leadership of his plan to attack Moncada. Castro expected Moncada to be occupied by only about 400 soldiers in a low state of alert. The Festival of Saint James in Santiago was expected to see revelers celebrating late into the night. Castro planned to arrive in the early hours of 26 July to seize the barracks before the alarm could be sounded. He expected the attack on Moncada to spark an uprising of citizens around Oriente. In addition, confiscating Moncada's weapons armory would enable the Movement to arm the locals.

After seizing Moncada, Castro planned to take over the radio station at Santiago to broadcast the Movement's manifesto which declared the Ortodoxo party the true inheritor of Jose Marti's ideals.

Ernesto Tizol, a member of the military committee, rented a two-acre farm located 10 miles from Santiago to be used for storage of weapons and assembly of troops. Weapons and uniforms were then transported from Havana and stored on the farm. Haydee Santamaria and Melba Hernandez made uniforms for the rebels including patches for rank.

Abel Santamaria traveled to Santiago on 6 July to command troops of the Movement until Fidel arrived. Castro chose 138 recruits for the Moncada operation and 27 at Bayamo. Fidel, driven by Teodulfo Mitchel, a black truck driver, rode in a large Buick automobile allegedly for a weekend visit to Varadero resort. When he arrived at the farm, Fidel met with Abel to discuss details of the attack.

Fidel planned to lead the main attack, and he ordered uniforms be worn over their regular clothes. Uniforms could then be discarded quickly if necessary. Everyone gathered at 0400 at which time Castro told them the plan. Most of the barracks soldiers were expected to be sleeping off their festival celebration or even away from the area.

At 0500 Castro spoke to his assembled troops. His speech was rather short considering his history for lengthy orations:

> In a few hours you will be victorious or defeated, but regardless of the outcome, listen well, friends, this Movement will triumph. If you win tomorrow, the aspirations of Marti will be fulfilled sooner. If we fail, our action will nevertheless set an example for the Cuban people, and from the people will arise fresh young men willing to die for Cuba.

The men loaded into 16 cars with their weapons and departed from the farm en route to Santiago. Immediately, trouble began; one car sustained a blown tire. Four of the occupants crowded into other cars and four had to remain behind at the farm. Another car took a wrong turn in Santiago and became separated from the convoy. A car arrived late after being lost on the streets of Santiago. Abel Santamaria's team arrived on time where they were directed to the civilian hospital. Another car arrived at Gate 3 of Moncada at approximately 0515. In a remarkable ruse, Movement leader Guitart shouted, "Attention! The general is coming." The guards stationed outside the gate snapped to attention as their rifles were grabbed out of their hands.

Castro's car drove through the gate followed by more cars in his convoy. The alarm signal sounded in the barracks. Enemy fire came from the military hospital and roof of the headquarters building. Soldiers from other parts of the compound rushed in with heavy fire. Castro pushed his way into one of the other cars when his own vehicle did not start. When the main group withdrew, they discarded weapons and uniforms and walked out to the street in different directions.

Abel Santamaria's group discovered it was too late to leave their position at the hospital. He told Haydee and Melba to go quickly to escape. A group of Moncada soldiers spread through the hospital and observed nothing unusual. However, the Moncada Press Officer had an appointment at the hospital and pointed out the rebels and two women had posed as patients. Dr Munoz protested the Moncada soldiers' behavior and had been then shot in the back. All 22 rebels who took refuge in the hospital were tortured and killed.

The attack at Bayamo had also been unsuccessful. Ten rebels escaped and 12 were captured, most of whom were killed. By mid-afternoon 26 July, Castro and 40 of his rebels returned to the farm from where they departed earlier in the day. Only 19 rebels agreed to go with him to the mountains at Gran Piedra when he departed later that day on foot.

News of the brutality at Moncada spread. A young female journalist smuggled photos out of Moncada that showed tortured bodies. Public shock and disapproval of the army's ruthlessness was condemned. Under this pressure, the Army Chief of Staff ordered the officer in charge to cease further brutality.

On 1 August Castro and two other rebels slept in a hut in the Sierra Maestra mountains when the Rural Guard surprised the sleeping men. The Rural Guard, mostly black soldiers, yelled, "Kill the whites," but the officer in charge, Pedro Sarria, ordered them not to shoot any of the captives. Despite Fidel's efforts to pass himself off as a farmer, Sarria had seen him at the University of Havana several years earlier and recognized him.

As Haydee and Melba languished in their cell, one day they heard loud voices from outside and spotted a hand from their window. They both knew immediately it belonged to Fidel.

Under interrogation, Fidel admitted everything truthfully and he was even allowed to speak on a radio broadcast. However, army leaders soon realized that had been a bad idea. Fidel spent much of his prison time in solitary confinement, but he managed to pass messages with help from other prisoners in the jail.

The trial of the rebels began on 21 September at the Palace of Justice in Santiago. The judges had no idea what awaited them. All three judges were professional attorneys and expected to hold the trials according to established procedures.

As a lawyer himself, Castro acted as his own counsel and argued eloquently in the courtroom packed with soldiers and journalists. Witnesses testified to the extreme brutality and torture some of the rebels experienced before they died. Castro appealed to the judges to gather all evidence for prosecutions. Somewhat surprised and confused, the judges agreed and ordered evidence to be examined. After a very unusual courtroom spectacle, the judges on 28 September sentenced Raul Castro, Pedro Miret, Ernesto Tizol and Oscar Alcalde to 13 years in prison. Haydee and Melba received seven months. Twenty rebels received 20 years and three men received three years.

On 16 October Castro's trial began in a civilian hospital near Moncada barracks. After a short speech by the prosecutor, Castro was sentenced to 20 years. Castro challenged the few minutes from the prosecutor did not justify sending a man to prison for 20 years. He asked the judges to allow him to defend his case without interruption. Approved by the judged, Castro then launched his two-hour defense speech. His most notable discourse began with the words, "History will absolve me." He frequently quoted Marti in his speech, the most famous, "The dream of today will be the law of tomorrow." When Castro finally concluded his speech and returned to his seat, rapt silence enveloped the room. The judges held a brief whispered discussion among themselves and then announced the verdict of 15 years imprisonment.

Fidel and 25 surviving rebels were immediately transferred to Model Prison on the Isle of Pines. Prisoners experienced somewhat more humane conditions; they could exercise, read books, cook food, receive family visitors once a month and send and receive mail. Castro then concentrated on maintaining cohesion of his small group of rebels, now referred to as the 26 July Movement. The Movement prisoners made their wing a school where Fidel taught history and philosophy, Pedro Miret taught ancient history and Montane taught English.

While in prison, Castro wrote his own defense in a long rambling treatise invoking everything and everyone from Cuba's 1940 constitution to St. Thomas Aquinas and even Martin Luther. He appealed to the unemployed citizens, farmers and urban

professionals who had been denied advanced opportunity. He put forth five revolutionary laws the Moncada rebels had intended to implement:

- Restoration and implementation of the 1940 constitution.
- Reform to put land in the hands of those who worked it.
- Obligation of employers to share profits with workers.
- Guaranteed markets for small sugar farmers.
- Confiscation of property and business obtained by fraud.

Castro's rebels raising the 26 July Movement flag. (Albert Grandolini Collection)

The rebels did not lose their enthusiasm while in prison. In Feb 1954 Batista came to the Isle of Pines to commemorate a new power plant. When Batista came near, all 26 rebels sang their anthem, "March of 26 July" in loud voices that could be heard throughout the area. When Batista heard the words of the song, he turned and departed immediately.

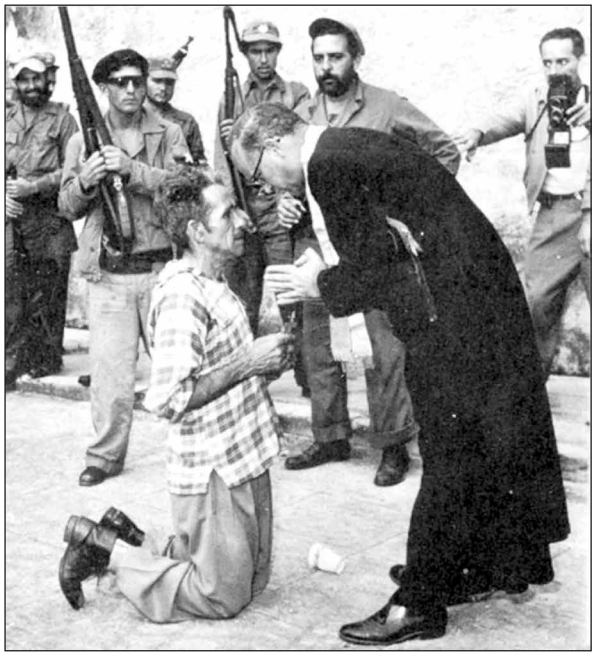
Castro's popularity did not wane due to his confinement. The magazine *Bohemia* interviewed him for a story published in June. *Bohemia* proclaimed a list of outstanding world figures in 1953, some of the list: Queen Elizabeth II of England, Shah of Iran, Soviet Secret Police Chief Berea and Fidel Castro.

On 15 May 1955 the Moncada prisoners were released. Fidel gave press conferences and radio interviews. Students carried him on their shoulders through the streets of Havana. His pre-prison influence had waned and others sought to take his place. Rumors of a plot to assassinate him led to seeking asylum in the Mexican Embassy, and he soon left for exile in Mexico with his brother, Raul. In Mexico Raul met Ernesto Guevara, an Argentine doctor. Raul learned Guevara (or Che as he was called) was a committed Marxist-Leninist. Che requested to meet with Fidel and Raul arranged the encounter. Through their discussions, Che understood that Fidel had few followers, no money and no weapons, but an abundance of passion for a revolution in Cuba. Che wanted to join Fidel as a fighter not simply as a doctor.

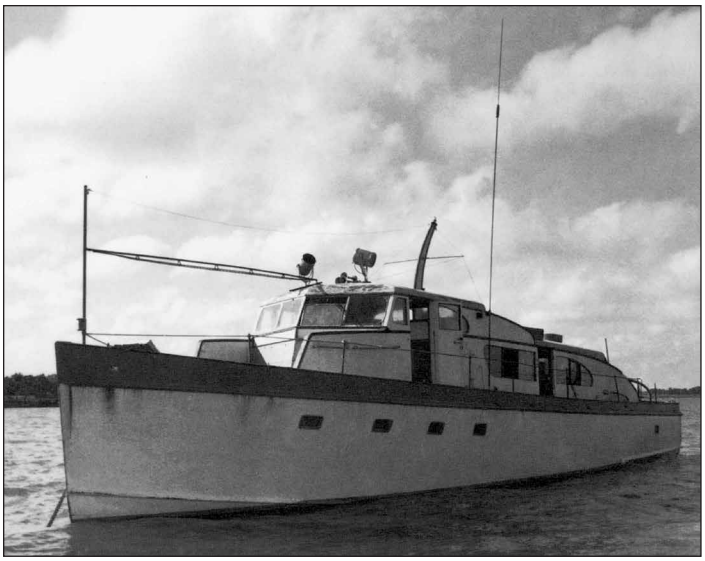
Fidel Castro meeting with soldiers at Moncada Barracks. (Albert Grandolini Collection)

In Cuba, Pedro Miret and Frank Pais worked in secrecy to develop plans for landing Fidel's expeditionary force. To bolster the Movement's financial status, Castro embarked on a six-week fundraising trip to United States cities of New York, Miami, Tampa and other areas with large Latin American populations. He then convinced a wealthy Cuban living in Mexico, Orlando de Cardenas, to buy weapons for the Movement.

While Castro was in the US on his fundraising tour, he attempted to buy a decommissioned naval patrol boat, but the sale fell through. A 13-meter wooden motor yacht became a viable substitute for Castro and the rebels from Mexico to return to Cuba. The yacht called *Granma,* was affectionately named for the original owner's grandmother. It was purchased in October 1956 for $15,000 USD from the United States-based Schyulkill Products


A condemned man receives rites from a priest prior to execution. (Albert Grandolini Coillection)

A jeep driven by Che Guevara with a group of rebels. (Albert Grandolini Collection)



The yacht *Granma* sailed by Fidel with a group of his rebels from Mexico to Cuba. (Albert Grandolini Collection)

Fidel Castro briefing his rebels, Raul at his left side with 26 July Movement markings on the sleeve of his uniform. (Albert Grandolini Collection)

Company by a Mexico City gun dealer, Antonio del Conde, secretly representing Castro.

The Cuban Embassy pressured the government of Mexico to increase surveillance of Castro. Police had information that he had breached conditions of his residence in Mexico. On 21 November a friendly policeman warned Castro that he had 72 hours to leave Mexico or face arrest. Castro chose the men who would accompany him on the yacht. On 23 November, Fidel departed Mexico City by car en route to Tuxpan on the Yucatan Peninsula where the yacht *Granma* was moored. At midnight, they loaded the vessel with weapons, fuel, food and water and the boat moved out of the harbor into the Caribbean for the journey to Cuba.

Norberto Collado Abreu, a Second World War Cuban Navy veteran and one-time ally of Fidel, captained the *Granma.* The destination was selected to coincide with the voyage of national hero, Jose Marti, who landed in the same region 61 years earlier during the war of independence from Spain. Included in the group were Fidel's brother Raul Castro, Che Guevara and Camilo Cienfuegos. They

North American P-51 Mustang fighter. Three were delivered to the rebel forces, but none saw action. After the Bay of Pigs invasion, the Mustangs were displayed at the Museo de Aire. (Albert Grandolini Collection)

Military leaders of US forces and Batista's army in front of two M4 Shermans. (Albert Grandolini Collection)

Cuban mothers march under a banner that says "Stop the Murders of Our Children". (Albert Grandolini Collection)

became known as *Los Expedicionarios del Yate Granma* (The Yacht *Granma* Expeditioners). A series of misfortunes plagued the yacht and its sailors, seasickness, dwindling supplies, as well as the vessel leaking. They landed at Playa Las Colorados, Oriente Province on 2 December 1956, sick, tired and hungry.

Che Guevara reported:

> We reached solid ground, lost, stumbling along like so many shadows or ghosts marching in response to some obscure psychic impulse. We had been through seven days of constant hunger and sickness during the sea crossing, topped by still three more terrible days on land. Exactly 10 days after our departure from Mexico, during the early morning hours of 5 December, following a night-long march interrupted by fainting and frequent rest periods, we reached a spot paradoxically known as Alegria de Pio (Rejoicing of the Pious).

When Batista learned of the arrival of the *Granma* loaded with rebels ready to fight, his troops prepared at the site he had predicted. Helicopters and fixed wing aircraft bombarded the arriving men when they reached the coast.[2] As Castro's men began their trek to the mountains, Batista brought the B-26s out to blast the yacht. Casualties mounted even as the survivors raced to the Sierra Maestra. The mountains harbored outlaws, squatters and more rebels. International media covered the skirmish and erroneously reported Fidel died in the battle. Of the 82 who came onshore, only approximately 20 survived. Three months later, Castro had recruited more rebels, but still not enough to be called a battalion.

In February 1957, *The New York Times* reporter Herbert Matthews came to Cuba at the invitation of Fidel Castro. Matthews was treated to a full dog and pony show complete with code words and mysterious visitors at night. The reporter believed the rebels were surrounded by Batista's army of many thousands. However, any reporter worth his salt would have sufficiently researched his subject to learn details of the opposing army. The story Matthews wrote for *The Times* based on a personal interview with Castro helped to ensure the rebel leader's reputation as a great hero. With world-wide attention focused on Cuba now, newsmen arrived daily to interview

Soldiers of Batista's army. (Albert Grandolini Collection)

Batista's troops delivering captured rebels to a police station. (Albert Grandolini Collection)

The Bearded One. Almost humorous stories, the reporters told of great battles against the dictator's huge army.

As early as 13 March 1957, rebels of the *Directorio Revolucionario* (Revolutionary Directorate) attacked the Presidential Palace in Havana and came close to capturing Batista. Unfortunately, by pure coincidence, he had left his office to return to the residence due to ill health. When he learned of the security breach, Batista ordered a brutal crackdown which resulted in the annihilation of most of the *Directorio Revolucionario* insurgents.

By September 1957, a broad conspiracy involving the Cuban Navy, Air Force and civilian rebels attempted to depose Batista. While the rebellion appeared to be well planned, rebels failed to coordinate their actions accurately. When the Cayo Loco Naval Base in Cienfuegos rebelled, there was virtually no outside civilian support. It would not be the last time expectations of civilian help would not materialize.

When Batista learned of the uprising, he ordered his Air Force to survey Cayo Loco to determine the situation. Two B-26Cs piloted by Captain Mario Zuniga and Captain Agustin Pineira Machin, flew to the area and sustained ground fire over the base. With the report of the rebels' activity, Batista directed the *Fuerza Aerea Ejercito de Cuba* (FAEC), Cuban Army Air Force, to "bomb the rebels into submission." The first strike came from the Republic P-47 Thunderbolts piloted by men involved in the conspiracy, and who released their ordnance over the sea or unpopulated land areas. Senior FAEC officers in a Douglas C-47 Skytrain observed the action and ordered the pilots to be grounded. Subsequent bombing by B-26 Invaders attacked on target. The Army successfully seized Cayo Loco with a cost of 33 troops killed in action. Among the rebels, 60 were killed and 83 captured.

While the US continued to support Batista with supplies, arms and ammunition until March 1958, the rebels strengthened and unified. Batista's planned final offensive in the summer of 1958 proved to be a failure. Government troops outnumbered the rebels, but Batista's followers were poorly trained and even less motivated. By the end of 1958, the rebels claimed city after city on the road to the capital. Castro led his rebels into Havana on New Year's Day, 1 January 1959 as Batista departed the country en route to the Dominican Republic with his family and an entourage of supporters.

Through graft and bribes, Batista amassed wealth of over $600 million USD in cash and fine art. Batista eventually found political asylum in Portugal, where he first lived on the island of Madeira

A Douglas C-47D Skytrain, #210, of the Fuerza Aereas Ejercito de Cuba. (Albert Grandolini Collection)

Black-painted Douglas B-26C Invaders of the Fuerza Aereas Ejercito de Cuba. (Albert Grandolini Collection)

One of three de Havilland Canada DHC-3 Beaver (or U-6A) utility aircraft acquired for the FAEC. Note its overall olive drab color. (Albert Grandolini Collection)

A group of pilots of the 10 March Squadron, in front of a P-47. Notable is that the latter was painted in 'Cuban Olive Green' overall by the time this photograph was taken. (Albert Grandolini Collection)

US Ambassador Arthur Gardner discussing the mechanics of the Lockheed T-33 Shooting Star with Batista. (Albert Grandolini Collection)

and then in Estoril, outside Lisbon. He was involved in business activities in Spain and lived in Guadalmina near Marbella at the time of his death from a heart attack on 6 August 1973.[3]

3

TRADING ONE DICTATOR FOR ANOTHER

Castro declared in a speech on 21 January 1959: "When the masses are organized, there is not a single imperialist…who can operate." He explained the US had started "A campaign against the people of Cuba because we want to be free not just politically, but economically as well." Cubans were so inspired that Committees for the Defense of the Revolution (CDR) formed quickly, but soon revealed "more energy than order, more enthusiasm than discipline". However, the CDR implemented the first vaccinations and literacy programs in Cuba.[1]

The new Cuban Republic reinstated the Constitution of 1940 which had been discarded by Batista in 1952. On 13 February 1959 President Jose Miro Cardona, who replaced Batista, resigned and Fidel Castro became Prime Minister.

On 3 March 1959, the new government nationalized the Cuban Telephone Company and drastically reduced telephone rates. Next in his sights, Castro demanded the US military vacate the Guantanamo Naval Base on the southern end of the island; however, the US refused to leave. In a 1903 lease agreement, the US assumed territorial control over the southern portion of Guantanamo Bay. The US currently exercises jurisdiction and control over the territory while recognizing Cuba retains ultimate sovereignty. Cuba regards the US presence at the Guantanamo Bay area as an illegal occupation based on the Cuban-American Treaty which "was obtained by threat of force and is in violation of international law."[2]

Fidel Castro, left, with a group of his rebels and villagers listening attentively. (Albert Grandolini Collection)

Fidel and Raul Castro and Che Guevara each had plans for the new Cuba, and they did not always agree. Che Guevara's vision argued for the abolishment of the monetary market. His socialist idea believed in moral incentives rather than material rewards. Che's idea assumed people would not need any currency to secure goods and services. Private farms larger than 67 hectares (one hectare equals 2.47 acres) were nationalized. Additionally, the government assumed control of all rental housing and set rents at no more than 10 percent of the

Castro's rebels in Santa Clara with a cache of weapons. (Albert Grandolini Collection)

family's income. Most everything needed by the population was then provided by the government: Health care, education, phone service, public transportation and even day care for young children while parents worked.

Radical reforms started to appear after January 1959. For example, laborers received wage increases of 15 percent and the unemployed population received jobs. With landlords and business owners' income reduced, rents and utility services also declined. Social services such as education, medical care and medicine became free for all. Cost of public utilities was greatly reduced. The new Castro government created the Rural Health Service that established health care facilities for the large rural populations. The government required medical school and dental school graduates to spend a year serving farm communities.

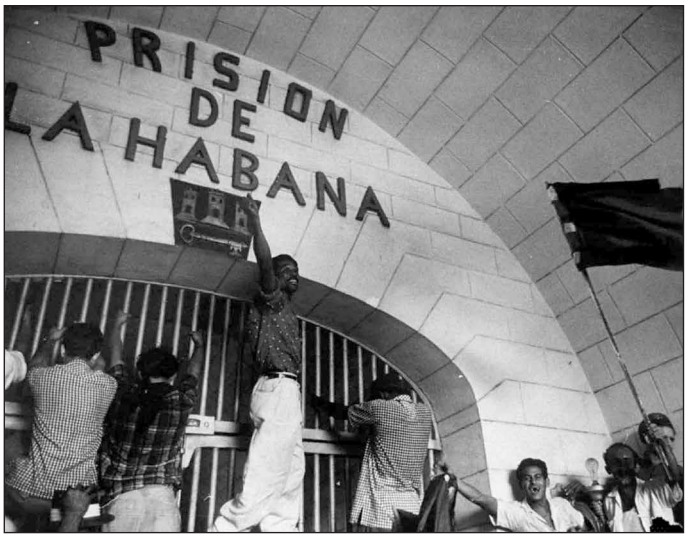
A goal of the revolution had been to end reliance on the US for economic support. As with peasants in the USSR and China, those in Cuba suffered exploitation as capitalists sought to expand industrialization. Some areas fared worse than others, but widespread starvation caused an exodus from the countryside to the urban areas. Existing slums in nearby cities became overwhelmed with the arrival and demands for jobs and food increased.

Che Guevara meeting with members of a tank unit. (Albert Grandolini Collection)

In late 1958 three prominent members of the American Society of Newspaper Editors (ASNE) met in New York to discuss their annual convention. George Healy of the *New Orleans Times-Picayune* served as president of the organization. Don Maxwell of *The Chicago Tribune* and Alicia Patterson of *Newsday* served as members of the program committee for the convention in four months. The group still needed a big-name speaker. After several names surfaced, all three spoke in unison, "What about Castro?" They knew a good story when they saw one, and the publicity for the convention would dramatically increase participation. Maxwell immediately phoned his Cuba correspondent, Jules Dubois, who reported he would work on it. By 1500 the same day, Dubois called Maxwell to say Castro had eagerly accepted the invitation.

Fidel's eleven-day (15 – 26 April 1959) "unofficial" visit to the US was an overwhelming success from the time his plane touched down

Mariana Grajales Women's Platoon soldiers of the 26 July Movement in an M3 White Scout Car. (Albert Grandolini Collection)



Castro's rebels at Havana Prison. (Albert Grandolini Collection)

at Washington National Airport. Dressed in his customary battle fatigues, wild beard and boundless energy, Castro fascinated and charmed the crowds wherever he went. While in the government offices of Washington, DC, men conspired to destroy Castro, a great number of the US population loved the Cuban revolutionaries. Both Fidel and Raul Castro and Che Guevara appeared as heroic freedom fighters who fought to secure independence for their country. Their scruffy beards and camouflaged uniforms lent an air of bad boy romanticism. Like a political candidate, Fidel kissed babies, signed autographs and totally ignored his security detail. Demand for ASNE tickets became a hot commodity, the most sold since General MacArthur spoke to the group a few years previous.

The New York newspapers ran stories of the preparations for Fidel Castro's upcoming visit to the United Nations. The Cuban entourage consisted of 80 men and one woman, Theresa Cassuso, secretary to Fidel. The group arrived with 200 suitcases at the Shelbourne Hotel on Lexington Avenue which greatly stressed the manager like no other high-profile guests. Castro later showed up at the Hotel Theresa in Harlem where Premier Nikita Khrushchev raced to greet Fidel and posed for photographs. While in New York, Castro maintained contact with his cabinet in Havana by telephone.

Castro exhibited the demeanor of a cooperative neighbor when he told the US Senate Foreign Relations Committee he would not expropriate US property in Cuba. To television audiences of Meet the Press, he said he opposed Communism and supported "Cubanism" not socialism. His photo opportunities showed him laying wreaths at the Lincoln and Jefferson monuments in Washington, DC. Some congressmen immediately voiced support for The Bearded One while others reminded their colleagues of reality citing firing squad executions in Cuba that week alone had totaled 521.

President Eisenhower refused a meeting with Castro citing as reason he had a previously scheduled appointment. In fact, the President went to Augusta, Georgia to play golf. Most foreign heads of state would never consider visiting America without an official invitation from the State Department. And yet, Castro had the audacity to come to the US anyway. Vice President Richard Nixon met with Fidel in his office in the Capitol on a Sunday afternoon. Nixon reserved a more cordial welcome meeting for visiting dignitaries who exhibited pro-American attitudes, but Castro did not seem to notice. The two talked for three hours which mostly consisted of Castro's attempt to impress Nixon. Following the meeting, Nixon reported to Eisenhower, "While Fidel Castro may deny it, he is a Communist, saying things like democracy is more than just a word. There can be no democracy where there is hunger, unemployment and injustice."

US Ambassador to Cuba, Philip Bonsal, reported to officials in Washington, Castro was not "a thinker or a planner." However, it appears Castro calculated how best to take advantage of his recent favorable acceptance he received in the US.

The US also vehemently denied Castro's claim of 30 bombing raids that destroyed 225,000 tons of sugar crops. However, the US admitted a small private plane had raided Cuba from a south Florida airfield. State Department officials ordered the top US diplomat remaining in Havana, Daniel Braddock, to "express to the Cuban government this government's sincere regrets the plane managed to escape the vigilance of our intensified airfield patrols in Florida."

On 2 May 1959, with support of liberal senators, the US signed a Point Four Agreement with Cuba "offering technical cooperation in the development of Cuba's agrarian reform program." On 8 May 1959 Castro gave a rousing speech to a crowd in Havana estimated to be 300,000. The speech announced to the citizens that "revolution was neither capitalist nor Communist but a step in the future for all."

The Cuban government enacted the Agrarian Reform Law on 17 May 1959 which distributed all farmlands over 1,000 acres to landless workers and prohibited foreign ownership of land. Prior to the law, foreign ownership of Cuban land totaled 75 percent of the most fertile properties. With the enactment of this law, approximately 200,000 Cuban families owned land for the first time. On 20 August 1959 rates for electricity from the Cuban Electric Company, owned by the American Foreign Power Company, were reduced by 30 percent. Until that time, many Cuban households did not have electricity, but used oil lamps.

Senator George Smathers (Florida) proposed on 5 June 1959 an amendment to reduce the Cuban sugar quota. The US government protested the terms of compensation given to US companies for their land. US landowners' reimbursement based on tax assessment rates that had not been adjusted for more than 30 years, but the Cuban government refused to budge. However, landowners in Britain, Canada, France, Italy, Mexico and Spain negotiated with the government of Cuba and reached satisfactory agreements.

In July 1959 Major Pedro Diaz Lanz, 32 years old, a former commander in the Cuban Air Force, fled Cuba in a small sailboat and arrived in Miami a few days later. Invited to testify at a Senate Subcommittee on Internal Security, Lanz told of Communists in the highest ranks of the Cuban military service. Troops now were required to use the term "Comrade" and all references to God had been removed from the constitution. He also reported the red star now appeared on all military vehicles, a symbol of Communism. Cuba's figurehead president, Manuel Urrutia, condemned Diaz Lanz for his treasonous testimony.

US officials determined in 1959 Castro's government "not the kind worth saving". While plotting against Castro in secret back rooms of Washington, US authorities insisted publicly "the United States is eager to promote better relations with the Castro regime." The State Department had for some months discussed Castro's removal. At the end of 1959 arguments among the department heads believed his continued presence would have "serious adverse effects on the United States position in Latin America and corresponding advantages for International Communism." Deputy Director of

the CIA, General Charles P. Cabell, expressed, "While the profile of Communists increased since Castro came to power, Castro himself is *not* a Communist." Cabell later came to understand his statement to be totally ridiculous.

In early December 1959, Jake Engler, former CIA Station Chief in Caracas, Venezuela, met many of the Cuban exiles who plotted against dictator Fulgencio Batista. Engler saw a hero's welcome for Castro as he rode in an open truck through Caracas as thousands of citizens crowded the streets cheering the Cuban rebel. Concerned about what he saw, Jake contacted Colonel J. C. King, Chief, CIA's Western Hemisphere Division and expressed his opinion Cuba was going to become a difficult situation.

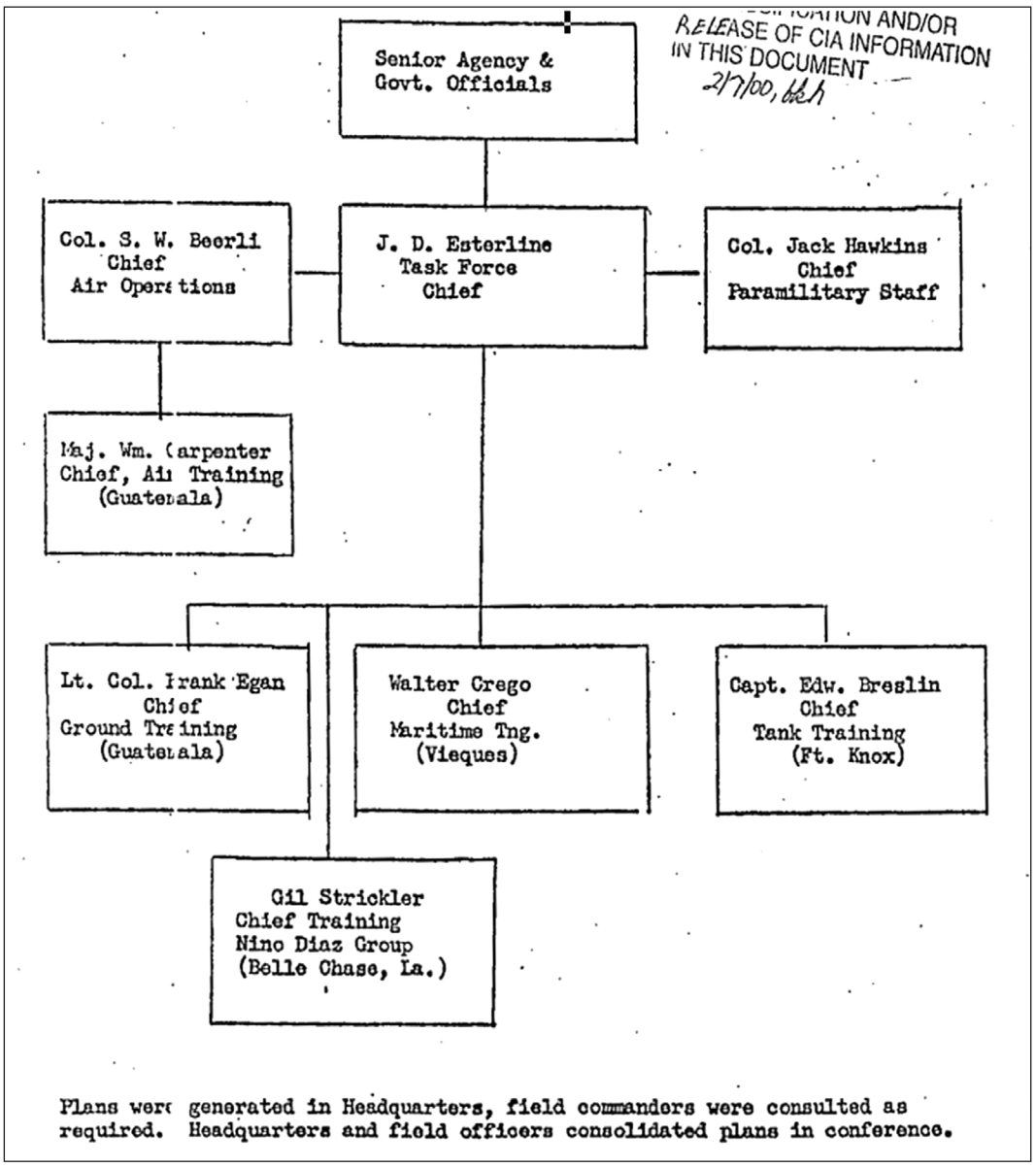
King prepared a memorandum for the Director of the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), Allen Dulles, that offered a plan to remove Fidel Castro. The plan recommended the overthrow of Castro within one year. King declared removal, even assassination, be carried out by force from an anti-Castro group. Wheels of government in Washington seldom moved quickly, but five days later Dulles requested conditional approval from the National Security Council to undertake covert action against Castro. Approval was immediately granted.

Allen Dulles attended a meeting at the White House on 11 January 1960 and displayed for the attendees a representation of the process to show an Agency plan for sabotage of select sugar refineries in Cuba. Dulles told the group about a certain drug which, if placed in his food, would make Castro behave irrationally.[3] Dulles, a fan of author Ian Fleming, envied the many gadgets created for the character James Bond. Dulles encouraged technicians to invent some of the devices Fleming wrote of in the Bond books. Nothing was too outlandish to consider.

Surprisingly, Eisenhower said the action was timely, but he believed the plan "too timid." The President favored an operation more aggressive than simple harassment. Vice President Nixon, an advocate for strong action against Cuba, expressed his opinion in a NSC meeting in December 1959 that the US should be more proactive. President Eisenhower on 17 March 1960 approved a covert plan to overthrow the Cuban Republic guided by the CIA with a secret army of Cuban exiles living in the US. By July 1960 he implemented an economic embargo of the island.

Castro appeared on Cuban television in February 1960 and told his viewers a small plane had crashed while attacking a Cuban sugar mill. He said the occupants, both killed, were Americans Robert Ellis Frost of Portland, Oregon and Robert Kelley of the US Civil Air Patrol. The State Department had no further identification of the pilots. However, the US investigation disclosed the plane had launched from Tamiami Airfield near Miami. The plane had loaded bombing material at another south Florida airfield before flying on to the Cuban sugar mill. Subsequently, the US recalled its Ambassador to Havana, Philip W. Bonsal.

The incident reported by *The New York Times* resulted in a huge embarrassment to the United States government. After the US State Department denied Castro's charges of US incendiary raids, the government announced tighter checks on illegal flights from Florida. Additionally, the US stated until Cuban authorities can present unquestionable evidence to the contrary, the US vigorously rejected the allegation. Castro called the State Department's bluff and accepted a US Embassy offer to send a team of experts to the crash site. Castro joked, "Uncle Sam's defenses against Soviet missiles



Bay of Pigs Organizational Planning Chart. (CIA FOIA Electronic Reading Room)

cannot be worth much if the United States is unable to detect and stop a little plane flying to Cuba."

In December 1960, Castro made clear what most US officials already believed. In a televised address on 2 December, he declared, "I am a Marxist-Leninist and shall be one until the end of my life." He went on to state that, "Marxism or scientific socialism has become the revolutionary movement of the working class." Some questioned Castro's dedication to the Communist cause, believing that his announcement was simply a strategy to get more Soviet assistance. Castro, however, never deviated from his declared principles, and went on to become one of the world's longest-ruling heads of state.

In the early 1950s, President Eisenhower had requested more accurate intelligence information on the Soviet Union. The Central Intelligence Agency determined the development of a high-altitude aircraft with outstanding photographic capability could meet the needs it required. The US awarded the Lockheed Martin Corporation of California the contract which had an unspecified budget but a short deadline. Originally designated CL-282 AQUATONE, the Air Force decided to call the new aircraft the U-2. The specifications of the camera system for the U-2 would be the backbone of the reconnaissance mission: Capable of photographing ground areas from altitudes in excess of 70,000 feet, weigh less than 500 pounds and compact enough to fit inside the equipment bay. The image on the film produced a picture 18 inches square. Lockheed ultimately developed the aircraft for only $1 million USD and refunded $2 million USD to the government.

One of Richard Bissell's first projects in the Agency was oversight of the development of the U-2. The US Air Force had tried to control the aircraft development, predicting a six-year development plan. Bissell, working with Lockheed Aircraft engineer, Kelly Johnson, delivered the plane in slightly over a year and remarkably under budget. Photographic analysts proudly showed film captured on the plane's first flight over the Soviet Union on 4 July 1956. The extraordinary clarity of the film showed the Winter Palace in Leningrad, the Kremlin in Moscow and even cars on the streets. At Bissell's request, the U-2 could identify the number of missiles deployed by the Soviets, troop movements and construction at military sites.

To add more tension in an already-troubled world, on 1 May 1960 a U-2 spy plane piloted by Francis Gary Powers, came into the crosshairs of Soviet Air Defense Forces. While photographing aerial reconnaissance deep inside Soviet territory, his aircraft was hit by an S-75 (NATO reporting name SA-2 "Guideline") surface-to-air missile and crashed near Sverdlovsk (present day Yekaterinburg). The US acknowledged the aircraft to be a civilian weather research plane operated by NASA. However, when the Soviets presented the captured pilot and photographs taken of its military bases, the US was forced to admit the mission's true purpose. Put on trial for his crime, the Soviet Union convicted Powers of espionage and sentenced him to three years in prison and seven years hard labor. He was released after two years on 10 February 1962 in a prisoner exchange for Soviet spy Rudolf Abel who had been held in the US. [4]

The incident occurred two weeks before Eisenhower and Khrushchev were scheduled to meet at the East-West Summit in Paris. The US experienced international embarrassment and deterioration of already-strained relations with the Soviet Union. When President Eisenhower arrived at the Paris Summit, Khrushchev demanded he apologize. Eisenhower adamantly refused and the summit collapsed when Khrushchev walked out.

4
THE LEADERS

John Fitzgerald Kennedy took the oath of office on 20 January 1961 to become the 35th President of the United States. Kennedy's administration began with a fresh perspective, youthful, active and progressive. Only 43 years old, he was the youngest chief executive of the United States. Educated at the prestigious Choate private school and then Princeton and Harvard universities, he counted as best friends some of the country's sons of similarly wealthy parents. Under his administration designated the New Frontier, Kennedy did not waste time getting started after his inauguration. Advisers and cabinet officials were similarly young, energetic and educated at Ivy League universities. Indeed, many attended the same colleges or universities, and could vouch for the character of an applicant to the government. The new president fell into the same genre, a Navy PT boat veteran of World War II, young, handsome and wealthy.

Kennedy's inaugural address, though short and simple, left no doubt about the new president's resolve. Many in Washington and around the country praised the speech as the best statement of policies ever expressed by a chief executive. In fact, a few lines of the address remain in the collective memories of many Americans: "And so, my fellow Americans: Ask not what your country can do for you—ask what you can do for your country. My fellow citizens of the world: Ask not what America will do for you, but what together we can do for the freedom of man."

By contrast, Nikita Sergeyevich Khrushchev was born 15 April 1894 to a peasant family in Kalinovka, Ukraine, a rural village of the Soviet Union. He had little education due to limited family finances, and at age 15 began work in a factory and later as an apprentice metal worker. He believed he owed everything to the Communist Party, and that Communism would ultimately destroy capitalist systems. On 5 March 1953, Stalin's death triggered a power struggle in which Nikita Khrushchev emerged victorious upon consolidating his authority as First Secretary of the party's Central Committee. On 25 February 1956, at the 20th Party Congress, he delivered the Secret Speech, which denounced Stalin's purges and ushered in a less repressive era in the Soviet Union. His domestic policies, aimed at bettering the lives of ordinary citizens, were often ineffective, especially in agriculture. Hoping eventually to rely on missiles for national defense, Khrushchev ordered major cuts in conventional forces.

In 1961 frequent news reports chronicled the Soviets' activities for control of Allied-controlled West Berlin; the Chinese focus on Vietnam and Laos; and the island of Cuba under the administration of a suspected Communist. To make matters worse, the Soviets became the first to put a manned spacecraft in orbit around the earth on 12 April 1961. Only three days after reluctantly congratulating

Khrushchev and Castro during negotiations in Moscow. (Albert Grandolini Collection)

Khrushchev for Yuri Gagarin's space flight, President Kennedy, humiliated by the Soviet's latest success, ordered the US National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) to accelerate plans to put an American on the moon.

5

CUBA IN TURMOIL

America's history of supporting corrupt dictators such as Fulgencio Batista, Gerardo Machado and Ramon Grau made average Cubans believe the US was not much better. While America sent millions of USD to Cuba, the money never made it to the ones who needed it the most.

In January 1960, the Castro government seized 70,000 acres of land owned by US sugar companies which refused to sell at any price. The United Fruit Company, which owned over 270,000 acres, had 35,000 acres confiscated by the Cuban government.

Cuba's diplomatic relations with the Soviet Union began on 17 May 1960. On the same day, the CIA created Radio Swan off the coast of Florida to broadcast US propaganda to the Cuban people encouraging them to overthrow their own government.

When the first shipment of Soviet oil arrived in Cuba on 7 June 1960, they were surprised to find every oil refinery in Cuba owned by US companies Esso, Texaco and British Shell. Not only had the US refused to sell oil to Cuba, but the companies refused to process the Soviet oil. The effect completely paralyzed the Cuban economy. On 27 June 1960 the US Congress amended the Sugar Act to eliminate Cuba's sugar quota. Cuba retaliated and nationalized the Texaco refinery on 29 June followed by Esso and Shell refineries on 1 July.

When the US suspended the trade of sugar with Cuba on 3 July 1960, 80 percent of Cuban exports were slashed. Again, the Cuban economy suffered drastically. Cuba dealt another blow to the US on 5 July by nationalizing all US businesses and commercial property. In retaliation, President Eisenhower cancelled the remaining 700,000 tons of sugar on the 1960 quota and threatened military action.

Only five days later the Soviet Union came to the aid of Cuba and announced the purchase of the 700,000 tons of sugar refused by the US. Premier Khrushchev explained the Soviet Union planned to protect Cuba from a US invasion force. Following the Soviet Union's action, China then agreed to buy 500,000 tons of sugar from Cuba for five years. Czechoslovakia sent anti-aircraft batteries and technicians to train military troops for Cuba's protection. Cuba's retaliation nationalized all remaining US industrial and agrarian land in Cuba.

On 17 September 1960 Cuba nationalized all US banks in Cuba, the First National Bank of Boston, First National City Bank of New York and Chase Manhattan Bank. Nearby the financial area, during a mass rally at Revolution Plaza where Castro spoke to a large gathering of citizens, unidentified terrorists detonated four bombs intended to kill Castro. The bombs missed their mark and Castro continued speaking as if nothing happened.

Cuban Foreign Minister Raul Roa Garcia informed the United Nations on 7 October 1960 the CIA trained exiles in Guatemala for an invasion of Cuba. The US, as with the previous allegation, denied the claims from the foreign minister which were dismissed by the UN.

Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev, on 2 January 1961 reported to a group at the Cuban Embassy in Moscow: "Alarming news is coming from Cuba at present, news that the most aggressive American monopolists are preparing a direct attack on Cuba." The US severed diplomatic and consular relations with Cuba the next day.

The US government protested on 12 January 1960 in the form of camouflaged counterrevolutionary Cuban aircraft that dropped napalm bombs on oil refineries and sugar cane fields in Cuba. Approximately 10 tons of sugar cane burned in Havana Province. Four 100-pound bombs dropped on Havana on 21 January caused extensive damage. US military aircraft bombed eight sugar cane fields between 28 and 29 January in Camguey and Oriente Province. The US then terminated weapons drops from US planes in Pinar del Rio and Escambray.

Another covert US military air attack on 7 February 1960 burned 30 tons of sugar cane and several mills in Camaguey. Cuba found support again from the Soviet Union for the damage inflicted by the US. Soviet Deputy Prime Minister Anastas Mikoyan arrived in Havana to accompany a trade exhibition of Soviet culture and technology. Mikoyan came bearing gifts for his host, a box of the best Russian caviar, while Castro presented his guest with a box of Cuban cigars. It appeared the real purpose of the visit came when Mikoyan and Castro signed a trade agreement on 13 February in which the Soviet Union pledged to purchase five million tons of sugar over five years. The Soviet Union also agreed to send Cuba oil and petroleum products, wheat, iron, fertilizers and farm machinery.

The Cuban government approached the US for peaceful negotiations on 29 February 1960 with an appeal for the cessation of bombing campaigns which the US publicly and privately denied. While talks with Cuba proceeded, US Secretary of State John Foster Dulles, a stockholder, longtime legal adviser and one-time president of the United Fruit Company, whose land had been purchased as a result of the Agrarian Reform Law, refused attempts to negotiate a peace agreement.[1] John Foster Dulles' brother, Allen Dulles, became the Director of the Central Intelligence Agency.

In March 1960 a $100 million USD loan scheduled to be issued to Cuba by Western European banks was cancelled based on pressure from the US. *La Coubre,* a French freighter from Antwerp, Belgium sailed into Havana Harbor loaded with arms and ammunition for Castro's army. At approximately 1500 hours, the ship blew up as it was docked in the harbor in a series of blasts that sent fragments of steel throughout the harbor. One hundred local citizens were killed and 300 injured. Castro did not miss an opportunity to lay blame on the US as an attempt to invade his country.

The United States embargo against Cuba prevented American businesses and commercial activities in the United States from conducting trade with Cuban interests. It was the most enduring trade embargo in modern history. The United States first imposed an embargo on the sale of arms to Cuba on 14 March 1958, during the Fulgencio Batista regime. Again, on 19 October 1960, almost two years after the Cuban Revolution had led to the overthrow of the Batista regime, the US placed an embargo on all exports to Cuba except for food and medicine. The US retaliated against Cuba for the nationalization of American-owned oil refineries without compensation. On 7 February 1960 the embargo was extended to include almost all exports except food and humanitarian supplies.

The CIA then plotted another attempt to assassinate Castro by poisoning his favorite cigars with botulism, a toxin so potent that its fumes were strong enough to kill. Another plan was hatched to have capsules containing botulism sent to Castro by Mafia contact. However, both attempts failed. Like many other Caribbean leaders, Castro took for granted he was vulnerable to assassination attempts. He assumed the CIA plotted against him, and his affinity for snacks at the cafeteria at the Havana Hilton Hotel known to many. Once a waiter who served him a milkshake had held poison in the kitchen, but he became too nervous to drop it in Castro's drink.

A group of Castro's rebels with weapons at the ready. (Albert Grandolini Collection)

Fidel in the turret of a British-built Comet tank. (Albert Grandolini Collection)

6
THE PLAN

At times different offices of the CIA remained unaware what other branches were doing. For example, CIA Agent Felix Rodriguez infiltrated Cuba from Key West, Florida in early 1961. He was met by a

Fidel and Che consulting in front of a captured Grumman TBM Avenger from Batista's air force. (Albert Grandolini Collection)

Women soldiers posing outside the University of Havana. (Albert Grandolini Collection)

Fidel holds a poster with his own image and declaring liberty. (Albert Grandolini Collection)

group of Cubans on the coast and taken to a safe house in Havana. Rodriguez later claimed responsibility for a fire at Havana's largest department store, El Encanto, a few weeks before the Bay of Pigs invasion. However, there has not been any recognition of his activities from the CIA.

When the CIA launched an operation to overthrow Fidel Castro, initially there had been no discussion of a large-scale invasion. The original idea was a small force trained by Agency specialists in guerrilla tactics. This plan would not reveal direct US involvement. Richard Bissell became the brains behind the operation estimated to take eight months planning and training and $4.4 million USD budget. Bissell quickly developed an organization chart for the Cuba Task Force, designated as Branch 4 of the Western Hemisphere Division, or WH/4.

The Agency recruited anti-Castro Cuban exiles in the south Florida area beginning in May 1960. The unit would come to be known as Brigade 2506, comprised mostly of idealistic young men, vehemently opposed to Communism. Many of the exiles came from middle and upper classes of Cuban society. They had not agreed to join the Brigade for financial gain but rather had been motivated by a commitment to overthrow Fidel Castro and rid the country of Communism. Recruits were directed to various houses and apartments throughout the Miami area before they finally met their American leaders.

Bissell thought Eisenhower's attitude toward Cuba too casual, but he was relieved when the President approved $13 million USD on 18 August 1959 to support the development of a plan. Early in the planning of the operation, Bissell faced a hurdle being unable to get the pick of the best brains for his operation. Word of a new temporary operation forced department heads to close ranks and protect their own teams; no one volunteered. However, for some supervisors, it was a great opportunity to get rid of less than productive employees. At the beginning, Bissell's team numbered 40 experts from various areas of government and private industry. By the invasion date, approximately 400 to 600 noncombatants were assigned to the Agency for the Cuba project.

On 18 January 1960, Colonel J. C. King, Chief, Western Hemisphere Division of the CIA summoned Jake Engler to a meeting. None of the other attendees had heard of a place called the Bay of Pigs. Before the year ended, everyone at the meeting would know more about the Bay of Pigs than they ever thought possible. Because of Engler's experience in Latin American, King appointed him project director. Before Engler's assignment to Venezuela, he served as the CIA Cuba Desk Officer and Chief of Station in Guatemala. He considered himself the knowledgeable source that held the project's elements together on behalf of the CIA Deputy Director of Plans, Richard Bissell.

Many of those present at King's meeting were veterans of the CIA 1954 coup in Guatemala. In that operation, the CIA overthrew the government within one week. The Agency planned to use the same training facility they operated for the Guatemala operation, the now-abandoned US Navy Air Base at Opa Locka, in suburban Miami, Florida. Two senior field officers, Tracy Barnes and E. Howard Hunt, recruited another Guatemala participant, David Atlee Phillips whose services as the propaganda chief figured prominently in the current plans. Experience from his public relations business in Cuba representing US companies indicated that many Cubans were more sophisticated than the planning group had assumed. Middle-class Cubans listened to Miami radio stations and watched American

programs on television. This demographic was crucial as the more educated group appeared to be turning away from Castro's diatribe.

Engler called a meeting attended by Phillips, Hunt and Bissell's assistant, Jim Flannery. Together they hatched a plan to locate a 50-kilowatt transmitter to broadcast propaganda programs to Cuba. The transmitter, presently located in Germany, was operational in 30 days on Great Swan Island, a one and a half miles long and a half mile wide strip of land in the western Caribbean off Honduras. US Navy Seabees constructed a dock for unloading the transmitter. Phillips' crew learned since 1863 both US and Honduras claimed sovereignty over the tiny strip of land. Unexpectedly while the team worked one day, a group of Honduran students arrived by boat, planted their flag and sang their national anthem. The Agency men greeted the students, invited them to share a beer and a short time later bid them goodbye. There were no more visits from Honduran citizens.

Unknown to Phillips and Engler, Bissell was working on another plan, the assassination of Fidel Castro. Even President Eisenhower knew nothing of this plan. When Secretary of State Allen Dulles, met with President Eisenhower, he expressed little more than casual interest. He told Dulles, if the Agency wanted to mount a greater effort against Castro, they should "develop a program." When a representative of the National Security Council spoke of a "plan against Castro," Eisenhower adamantly denied it. He responded, "There is no plan."[1] On 14 March, the Special Group participants in the National Security Council, discussed the effect on the Cuban population if Fidel and Raul Castro and Che Guevara should disappear simultaneously. With no one waiting to move into the government in their places, Admiral Arleigh Burke, Chief of Naval Operations, said, "The danger is that the Communists might seize control." Although assassination was not specifically discussed, they all believed they were not alone in hoping Castro could be removed. On 17 March Eisenhower approved the Agency's plan. The Cuba project was now official.

An unlikely agent assigned to the exiled Cubans in Florida was Gerry Droller, aka Frank Bender. Droller/Bender worked during World War II for the Office of Strategic Services (OSS) behind the lines in France. He had been assigned as a Swiss desk officer. German-born Droller spoke no Spanish, and his English heavily accented. His less than congenial personality made him unpopular with the Cubans and Agency personnel alike. The Agency brought in E. Howard Hunt to work with Droller, but the twosome managed no better than rival Cuban groups. Droller met with a Cuban contact without Hunt's knowledge and was subsequently reprimanded for the single-handed action. Hunt then teamed with Bernard Barker who was born in Havana to American parents. A veteran of the US Air Force, Barker had a strong military mindset. He became dedicated to Hunt and was quoted as saying, "I was not there to think, I was there to follow orders." Barker and Hunt made a good team. They dealt with the exiled Cubans and settled disagreements among the troops. Hunt carried a large amount of cash in his briefcase and distributed funds liberally among the exiles.

Robert K. Davis' title was First Secretary of the American Embassy in Guatemala City, but he was actually CIA Chief of Station. Fluent in Spanish and experienced in Latin American affairs, he had been part of the Agency's Guatemala team in 1954 to overthrow President Jacobo Arbenz Guzman. On that team, Davis worked with Jake Engler with whom he became personal friends.

Current Guatemala President Miguel Ydigoras strongly supported the US since the coup that put him in office. The $50 million USD a year he received in aid from the US sealed the friendship, and Ydigoras willingly came onboard to do what he could for the Cuba project. Ydigoras' friend, Roberto Alejos, had already learned of the project from his brother, Carlos Alejos, the Guatemalan Ambassador to the US. Carlos asked Davis what he could do to help, and Davis quickly responded he needed a secure location to train radio operators. Carlos had such a place immediately available, and he coordinated the plan with his brother.

Roberto drove Davis to the 5,000-acre plantation called Helvetia in the Sierra Madre Mountains with altitudes from 4,000 to 8,000 feet. The nearest village, San Felipe, was 15 miles away. Roberto's only request was a few refrigerators in exchange for use of the area. Davis pronounced it a perfect trade.

One member of the Cuban exile team, Jose Basulto attended Boston College where he majored in physics. In his early twenties, Basulto was a handsome, intelligent young man with a great sense of humor and a bit of a swagger. On 21 May 1959, Basulto joined 20 exiles to be trained as radio operators at Fort Myers, Florida. No one mentioned the CIA among the group while training. Jose observed there were many professionals in charge, most had a strong military bearing. Radio training continued for nine months, taught by American instructors who covered cryptography with two different radios. The radiomen felt special, especially with access to the code books. They went by boat to Useppa Island, a short 30-minute ride from the mainland.[2]

Bob Davis, Agency Chief of Station in Guatemala City, learned Washington again had plans for him. Engler told him the Brigade of Cuban exiles would expand to 400. Davis responded to the news with yelling, cursing and rants that he would not tell Ydigoras an army was coming to Guatemala. When the dust settled, Davis met with Ydigoras who readily agreed to the planned number of trainees. The Guatemalan president easily understood the Americans' *quid pro quo* and knew he could ask and receive in exchange for Davis' request.

On 20 July 1959 a cable sent to CIA Headquarters reported from Havana Station "a Cuban volunteer agent" would probably be in contact with Raul Castro soon. What intelligence should the agent try to get?" The response to the Havana Station on 21 July stated, "Possible removal top three leaders is receiving serious consideration at Hqs. Was the volunteer sufficiently motivated to arrange an accident for Raul Castro?" The volunteer was to be offered $10,000 payable after successful completion. After talking with the volunteer, the agent returned to his office to find a cable from Washington: "Do not pursue request. Would like to drop the matter." The volunteer returned and reported he could find no way to arrange a successful "accident."

The idea of assassinating Castro still floated in meetings and discussions. Colonel Sheffield Edwards, Director of the Agency's Office of Security, asked to meet with Bissel when he laid out his idea for using the Mafia which would be motivated to help by the financial loss they suffered in Cuba. Bissell thought the plan so outrageous it might work. Chief of Operational Support, James O'Connell, assisted by Robert Maheu, were assigned the task.

Robert Maheu, owner of a private investigation firm, and former Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) agent, received a monthly retainer from the CIA for jobs which they did not want any of their employees to do. Maheu had been an influential member of

billionaire Howard Hughes' select inner circle. As a powerful aide to the reclusive tycoon, he spoke for Hughes in all negotiations.[3]

O'Connell asked Maheu to contact an underworld figure named John Rosselli with a proposal to eliminate Castro, and subsequently recover their investments in Cuba. Maheu decided when he met Rosselli that the cover story would be tossed. The two men discussed the plan and Rosselli concluded he wanted to help because he considered it his patriotic duty. Rosselli had faced deportation for illegal entry into the US as a young man. He believed it an opportunity to make a trade with the US government for his help and to set the record straight.

Richard Bissell and Sheffield Edwards, Director of the Agency Office of Security, briefed Allen Dulles who still knew nothing of the Mafia's involvement to assassinate Castro. Throughout the briefing, Dulles only nodded but gave the impression he knew what was planned and that he had approved.

Rosselli met with his Agency contacts as John Rawlston and told them he represented Wall Street financiers who had interests and properties in Cuba. In October Robert Maheu and O'Connell, known as "Jim Olds," joined Rosselli/Rawlston when he introduced two men, Sam Gold and Joe (no last name given), who he expected would be implementing the plan. The identities of the men were unknown, but a current news magazine showed photographs of them as part of the FBI's Ten Most Wanted Criminals List. Sam Gold was Momo Salvatore Giancana, Mafia Chief of Chicago. Joe was really Santos Trafficante, underworld chief in Havana. A serious breach of security surfaced when Giancana told some friends he was involved in an assassination plot against Castro.

The FBI also discovered Roselli/Rawlston and Giancana partied in Las Vegas with a woman named Judith Exner. She had even met President-elect Kennedy and developed a personal relationship. The opportunity for leaks and even blackmail greatly concerned the Agency team, and they decided to skip the Mafia plan.

Front page headlines written by Paul Kennedy (no relation to the president) in *The New York Times* on 10 January 1959 announced: US Helps Train an Anti-Castro Force at Secret Guatemala Air-Ground Base." Sub-heading written: "Clash With Cuba Feared" and "Installation Built With American Aid." An additional story read: "Commando-like forces are being drilled in guerrilla warfare tactics by foreign personnel, mostly from the United States. The US is assisting this effort not only in personnel but in material and construction of ground and air facilities." Guatemala officials insisted the training operation was for its own defense only to prepare for an expected assault from Cuba.

At Jose Marti International Airport in Havana, Eduardo (Eddie) Ferrer, a Cubana Airlines captain had prepared for Flight 480 to Santiago de Cuba with stops in Varadero Beach, Cienfuegos, Santa Clara and Camaguey. Eddie, a handsome, 30-year-old who made friends easily, smiled and joked often. On the morning of 27 July 1960, Eddie appeared to be in good spirits. He asked a pilot friend in front of armed security guards, "Are you leaving the country for Miami?" Everybody around the two pilots chuckled. Eddie's friend replied, "I'm not leaving. Are you?"

Ferrer smiled and responded, "I'm leaving right now." He showed his grin, but he was not joking; he needed to deflect any suspicion about his loyalty to Castro. He carried a 9mm Browning pistol in his flight bag given to him in Miami by a CIA agent. Ferrer was in fact en route to Miami to fly for the Brigade. The Agency representative had suggested he fake a hijacking of his own plane with 14 passengers who boarded the flight, five of whom were part of the plan. As with all Cubana Airline flights, Ferrer's had an armed security guard seated in the rear of the aircraft. The "highjacking" went off as planned with the assistance of the other passengers who helped disarm the guard. Half of the passengers requested asylum in Miami and three joined the Brigade.

One of Ferrer's pilot friends who preceded him to Miami told him to go to an apartment on Segovia Street in Coral Gables. There he met Americans named "Bill" and "Jack." The Americans met with approximately 40 other Cubans who they questioned, as they did Ferrer, about flying experience and military skills.

Four days a week, 10 hours a day, Ferrer took various tests, mostly psychological. Eddie and the other Cubans studied 15 books a day, and were tested on technical, aircraft and vital flight knowledge. The material was standard US Air Force examinations. On the fifth day, an American medical doctor asked each man more personal questions: "Why do you want to fly? What do you oppose about the Castro government?" The questions continued in the same vein for what seemed to be hours. Eddie was then directed to another room where an American administered a lie detector test.

A few days later at the Office of the Frente (The Front), the loosely organized feud-ridden exile political leaders, Brigade infantry recruits met at the building awaiting their next instructions. Ferrer encountered his fellow "hijackers," Perez and Vergara who had orders to proceed to the training camp immediately. At Frente, Ferrer and 45 other pilots were issued uniforms: Khaki shirts and pants, baseball caps and bedrolls. At this point, all the men surrendered their driver's and pilot's licenses, and all other personal articles except wrist watches. Ferrer received his dogtags that read: "Eduardo Ferrer, 2592, alerg. peni." (allergic to Penicillin).

The pilots boarded two canvas covered trucks without markings driven by Americans for a three-and-a-half-hour drive to the abandoned Navy airfield at Opa Locka, Florida. There they boarded a Douglas C-54 Skymaster with blacked out windows and no exterior markings, for a seven-hour flight, still oblivious of their destination.

When they landed and the door opened, they saw two buses and a jeep with Guatemalan license plates. A Guatemalan Army colonel told the group in Spanish they would be going on a three-hour ride. The colonel told them, "If you have any occasion to speak to villagers, you should speak English only and say you are here to complete a construction project." However, their destination was Roberto Alejo's coffee plantation where they slept in one of the coffee barns on canvas cots. They had expected to fly, but construction at the base was unfinished. The pilots spent most days unloading trucks of supplies for their base nicknamed Camp Trax.

Prior to leaving Guatemala City to report back to CIA Headquarters, Bob Davis met with Alejos and President Ydigoras for dinner. After the lengthy meal and over cigars and strong coffee, Davis asked if there had been any problems. The President reluctantly brought up a worrisome issue. Cuban trainees had been going AWOL (Absent Without Leave) for a couple days at a time to meet prostitutes near the base. This had been a custom since the camps had been established, but the Cubans left the base in increasing numbers for longer periods. Training had been disrupted, and the Guatemalan Army could not keep rounding up the Cubans.

> Later in a meeting in Washington, DC with Bissell and Barnes, Davis brought up President Ydigoras' concern. Davis said; "We're going to have to get some whores for the Cubans."

Barnes quickly replied; "You can't use taxpayer money for that!"

"I'm not asking to use taxpayer funds, but we're going to have to get it done," Davis said.

Bissell told Davis; "I don't want to hear any more about this. Your job is to get things done. So, you figure it out."

The financial laws of the US caused Davis sleepless nights. If anyone went down for this, Davis knew it would be him.

Back in Guatemala, Davis explained to Ydigoras how Washington had reacted to the issue. The president told Davis to leave it with him, and a few days later the president reported, "All done." With that issue solved, the AWOL problem disappeared.

Eduardo Ferrer, designated the Brigade's Morale Officer, was assigned to a Curtis C-46 Commando squadron. He and the other pilots were now settled in better, but far from luxurious, accommodations they nicknamed "The Hilton." Unfortunately, the flying did not go so well. Flying a C-46 with an American instructor, one of the Cubans hit the runway so hard the landing gear collapsed and the pilot sustained a herniated diaphragm. A Douglas C-54 Skymaster four-engine transport hit a mountain damaging the wing. Ferrer worried the accidents caused the Americans to belt down their drinks after flying and grumble about "the fucking Cubans."

On 5 November, Ferrer observed the mission scheduling board and saw he was slated as navigator on a flight. The briefing scheduled at 1700 in the control tower was presented by the American air operations chief nicknamed "Barrigon" for his pot belly. The mission codenamed "Mad Dog" over the Escambrays was easy, but difficult to understand due to the operations chief's accent of the southern US. If the aircraft landed in enemy territory, the crew was ordered to shoot into one of the gas tanks and blow up the plane.

Ferrer and his crew launched at 1830 the next day on the 1680-mile (2703.6-kilometer) mission with 11,500 pounds of food and weapons. He flew 11 drop missions, mostly cargo, by navigation instruments. The captain instructed the cargo to be dropped even if the site was invisible. Ferrer understood instruction came from Washington, but he believed the Cubans should have been in radio contact with the planes.

The morale in early December hit an all-time low. Training slowed, supply drops diminished, the men grew bored and 13 pilots resigned. Surprisingly, the Americans became friendlier, and no longer referred to trainees as "the fucking Cubans." The sign "Classified Personnel Only" disappeared from the bar, and the Cubans welcomed to join.

Antonio de Varona and Dr. Antonio Maceo Cardona of the Frente leadership team, escorted by Howard Hunt, toured the camps in January 1960. The American camp commander and their driver dropped a military secret. They had released pamphlets on one of the flights over Cuba which informed citizens it would be dangerous to travel on railroads and highways due to heavy military traffic. Ground transport was likely to be bombed as well.

Hunt photographed the training facilities, drills and Brigade officers. He thought the publicity would stimulate recruiting. Engler totally against the plan said, "They tell Castro too much." When Varona returned to Miami and opened a newspaper, photos showed him inspecting the camps. So much for a secret operation.

A Curtiss C-46 Commando transport aircraft. (Albert Grandolini Collection)

A T-33A (serial number 711) of the FAEC, seen in the late 1950s. (Albert Grandolini Collection)

Numbers of the Brigade increased with more men arriving from Miami. The Americans in charge soon became frantic; the exiles argued about who should have the right to issue orders.

Rodolfo Nadal, a 26-year-old attorney, opinionated and articulate, joined the debate with his customary energy. In Cuba, he worked in one of the many anti-Castro groups. At Camp Trax, he became the Communications Officer of the 2nd Battalion. Nadal believed the Frente should appoint Brigade commanders, not the Americans. A big point of disagreement centered on the American-appointed commander, Pepe San Roman. He was a professional soldier, graduate of Cuba's military academy and trained at Fort Benning, Georgia and Fort Belvoir, Virginia. He knew how and when to obey orders and worked well with the Americans. Arguments continued and training halted altogether while the factions faced off.

Promises were made for positions in the post-Castro government, and two officers sent home for playing politics. The Americans feared the Frente stirred up trouble and consequently, asked for all weapons from trainees. The inventory consisted of rifles, pistols and submachine guns. Then a mutiny sparked in the 2nd and 3rd battalions. San Roman resigned to become a common soldier, citing "the Brigade belongs to no one but to Cuba, our beloved country."

Another American, Bernie, announced to the Cubans, "I am boss here, and Pepe San Roman is still commander of the Brigade." The commander then separated the men into two groups, one willing to fight with him, and one supporting the Frente.

When a CIA agent visited Major General George Reid Doster, Commander of the Alabama National Guard, they had a short to-the-point conversation. The Agency official said, "We need your help for a mission for the US government." Secrecy was paramount, and the agent hinted the mission to unseat Castro. Doster responded quickly and assembled a CIA Air Force of about 80 Americans. One of his recruits, Major Theodore C. Marrs, a pediatrician in Montgomery, whose office was full of patients when his commander called.

Doster said, "I've got a T-33 waiting for you. I want you here in 30 minutes."

Marrs arrived within an hour after the call. His only question, "When do we leave?"

Another recruit, John O. Spinks, a Senior Master Sergeant and expert gunsmith, had a gentle touch with aircraft guns, rockets and bombs. Doster dispensed with preliminaries, "Would you like to kick the hell out of Castro?" Spinks replied he was in and immediately arranged for travel to Miami and then a flight to Guatemala.

Doster contacted additional Air National Guard units in Arkansas and other southern states. His team had 45 days to complete readiness plans. Each recruit to the group received Doster's firm warning, "If you open your damned mouth, I'll have your ass."

Despite efforts to keep security tight, pilots frequently went missing and rumors circulated about something going down south of the border. Riley W. Shamburger and Albert Pearsons heard Doster had something big for four-engine pilots. Shamburger, an expert pilot, was operations officer of one of the Alabama National Guard squadrons. Pearsons, nephew of a former Alabama governor, enlisted in the Air Force in September 1939 and savored his combat experience. Pearsons met with Doster, but few details were forthcoming. However, he was plugged into the retired pilot network and knew Cuban exiles flooded south Florida. He agreed to attend a briefing in Doster's office.

Twenty pilots assembled at 0800. A civilian named Al revealed he represented some wealthy foreign nationals. Foreign pilots had been dropping supplies to guerrillas, but the cargo frequently landed in the ocean. Al explained he needed "American guts and expertise." Any pilot at this briefing who was interested in the project should pick a new identity and hometown and plan to attend the next briefing. Most of the men in the room believed Al represented the CIA.

Jake, one of the civilians, reviewed each pilot's new identity and hometown. Another civilian, Hoyt, explained each pilot would be paid $2,800 a month including $600 for expenses. In the event of an unfortunate death of a pilot, his widow will be paid $550 a month for her life.

At the next meeting, another civilian administered lie detector tests. The pilots were then instructed to buy new, unmarked work clothes and they all headed to the nearest Sears department store. The new pilots then went to the municipal airport at Fort Lauderdale for refresher training. They trained in an old, unmarked C-54 and at night they practiced touch and go takeoffs and landings with flare pots outlining the runway.

The Alabama National Guard pilots expressed their dissatisfaction about training the Cuban exiles. For one thing, the trainees were

difficult to put in an organized group. They could be a moody bunch, and some had less than 100 hours flying time. This fact concerned Doster, too.

Master Sergeant Spinks, the armaments specialist, never complained about staying up all night mixing napalm and loading 500-pound bombs on the planes that kept breaking down. Cuban pilots returned from training flights and complained their machine guns would not fire. When he checked the weapons, Spinks found the Cubans had loaded them improperly. The exile pilots treated Spinks like a friend and invited him to the big party in Havana to celebrate the victory.

Captain Cardona, Nicaraguan Camp Commander, invited Persons and three other Americans to Managua for a weekend and even checked them into a hotel. On Sunday at checkout time, Cardona was nowhere to be found. After several hours waiting in the lobby, the Americans decided to use the phone number they had been given for emergencies. The number turned out to be President Samoza's palace. It was like being unable to pay the bill at the Mayflower Hotel in Washington, DC and calling the White House for help. They had a long laugh about their predicament, but Cardona returned and paid the bill.

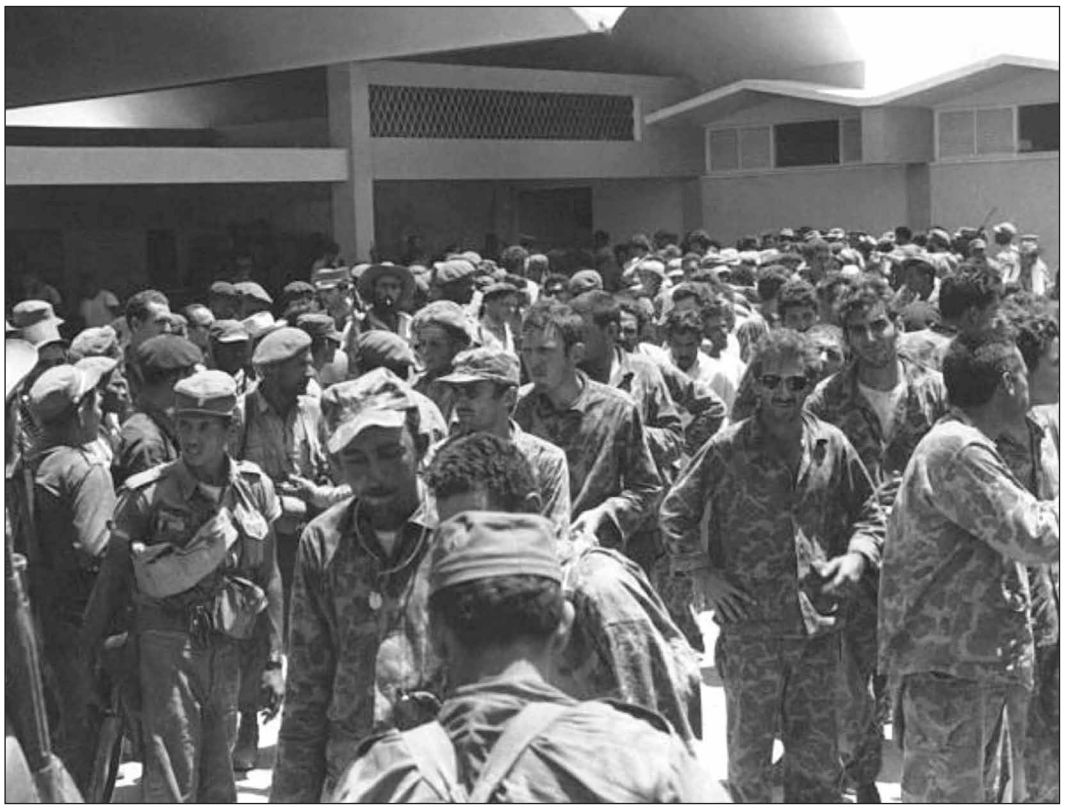
The National Security Council of the State Department met on 7 July 1960 at which time the Cuba operation headed the agenda. The action taken by the President earlier to reduce the sugar quota would likely invoke a reaction by Castro. If he seized US investments, the Department of State would be prepared to recommend further action. Castro had recently accused the US of imperialism opposed to progress. The Secretary recommended the radio program for Cuba be implemented immediately; broadcasts from Swan Island were expected to be operational very soon. Eisenhower continued to be cautious, and on 19 October 1960 he questioned Dulles about the Cuban exiles. Bissell assured him the Agency had made progress with their training. Eisenhower expressed his skepticism, "I'm going along with you boys, but I want to be sure the damned things work."

FAR troops await instruction regarding the boat. (Albert Grandolini Collection)

Dulles and Bissel briefed President-elect Kennedy in Palm Beach, but there were no unexpected questions. They briefed outgoing President Eisenhower shortly after. By this time, word had leaked about the "US-backed" group training in Guatemala, a fact known throughout Latin America. Without consulting the Cuba Task Force members, Bissell made the unilateral decision to escalate the Cuba project. It grew from a series of guerrilla air drops into a full-fledged military operation, but Special Group of the National Security Council and the President were not advised. His reason to keep those primarily involved together ensured he had his fingers in it all.

When the issue of air power for the invasion surfaced in the task force, Bissell recruited one of his favorites, Air Force Colonel Stanley Beerli to head the Air Operations Division. Beerli understood the necessity for secrecy and tight planning as essential to the covert operation. He learned the spy business while assigned to the CIA's U-2 project, and he was loyal to Bissell. At this time, Beerli's assignment was to make the Agency's "best professional efforts look sufficiently amateurish to be passed off as Cuban." "Plausible denial" was intelligence speak for the clandestine operation, and Kennedy continued to emphasize its importance in the operation.

An M35 truck captured from Brigade soldiers by the FAR. (Albert Grandolini Collection)



Assembled FAR soldiers, some with weapons. (Albert Grandolini Collection)

Beerli determined the vintage Douglas B-26B would be the best aircraft for the operation because it was sold throughout the world as surplus.[4] The Alabama Air National Guard personnel flew the B-26B, and they had the expertise to train the Cuban pilots. Planes had been picked from the USAF "boneyard" at Tucson, Arizona, where outdated and obsolete aircraft rusted in the desert waiting for a chance at another life. CIA technicians organized a plan to sanitize some of the B-26Bs in Arizona, removing all numbering and insignia in preparation for the appearance similar to Castro's own aircraft. The difference in the planes: Cuba flew the B-26C which had a clear plexiglass nose and the Brigade flew the B-26B with standard metal nose.

When Beerli approached Pentagon officials for help facilitating the transfer of the aircraft from the boneyard, he found them less than accommodating. He later said he had to fight for everything from his own colleagues. The Pentagon even required a transfer of funds from the CIA to the Department of Defense.

Dick Drain requested the Army for loan of 27 Special Forces sergeants to help train Brigade ground troops. The Secretary of the Army, Wilbur Brucker, refused the request and Drain had to appeal up the chain of command to President Eisenhower.[5] The Army's opposition not only started at the top, but Colonel Edward G. Lansdale, told the Under Secretary of Defense, James Douglas the CIA planned a beach invasion of Cuba. It was hard for the Secretary to ignore Lansdale's experience in guerrilla warfare. Eisenhower believed the operation still in the early stages, and none of the task force let him believe otherwise.

One State Department foreign service officer, Thomas C. Mann, was known to be extremely conservative. The question that puzzled Mann: "Whether intervention in Cuba was even legal." He sought a definition of "intervention" from State's legal department where he searched volumes of books and documents for an answer. In the end, he convinced himself that Cuba was a Soviet satellite and the degree of Communist danger "in direct proportion to the geographic proximity of a country to the US."

John F. Kennedy, elected and awaiting inauguration, and Eisenhower, preparing for departure, advised their teams against discussing current issues with anyone. However, Mann considered the matter serious enough to require immediate study. He attempted unsuccessfully to meet with Secretary of State-designate Dean Rusk.

On 5 February, Jose Basulto, Brigade number 2522, and 14 other exiles completed infiltrator training in Panama and assembled for a mission briefing. Instructions were vague: Gather intelligence and train saboteurs in Cuba. Jose understood they wanted an agent in Oriente Province, his destination. He chose Santiago de Cuba where his relatives and friends lived. Escorted by agent Carl, the team boarded a Douglas DC-3 en route to Virginia. At a nearby Navy base, they were issued civilian clothes with all labels removed. Then a twin-engine Aero Commander 500 flew them to Baltimore where Basulto met his case officer, Tom. Together they flew to Boston with the purpose of building Jose's cover story that he was kicked out of Boston College and wanted to return to Havana to continue his education.

Another exile, Jorge Recarey, was given 2,000 Cuban pesos, a fake driver's license and work permit, both in the name of Julio Ceasar Blasco. He and four other exiles were driven to a dock at Key West where they boarded a V-20 speedboat captained by Eugenio Rolando Martinez. Their destination: Havana, a ten-hour boat ride from Key West.

The Agency shopped for a navy to meet their needs and their choice was Garcia Line Corporation with offices in Havana and New York City. Garcia Line, the only shipping company still delivering rice and sugar from Havana, provided a perfect cover. The freighters were civilian, small, slow and old. Owner Alfredo Garcia and his five sons had only contempt for Castro. Garcia and his ships at great risk brought anti-Castro leaders out of Cuba whom the Agency wanted to meet.

Eduardo Garcia, a partner of the shipping line, met Agency contacts in secure apartments in New York and Washington. The agents who only used first names, told Eduardo they wanted to charter his ships to transport ammunition, aviation fuel and supplies to a Central American port and to take men and cargo to a Cuban port. Garcia was concerned about the safety of his ships and did not want them destroyed. The Agency men told Garcia, there would be air cover and Castro's planes would be destroyed early in the conflict. Eduardo agreed to furnish his ships for $600 per day per ship plus expenses of fuel, food and crew. Eduardo told the Agency officials he wanted to protect his crew, some of whom had worked for him for 20 or more years. He requested machine guns on bridges, bows

A Landing Craft Vehicle and Personnel (LCVP) abandoned near the beach and exposed for foreign press. (Albert Grandolini Collection)

and sterns of all his ships. The Agency men laughed, "Who is going to attack a fleet protected by US air and sea power?" Eduardo did not laugh when he reminded them all the fuel would be stored on the deck in barrels. Even if a Piper Cub shoots a.22 caliber pistol, the entire ship would go up in a massive explosion.

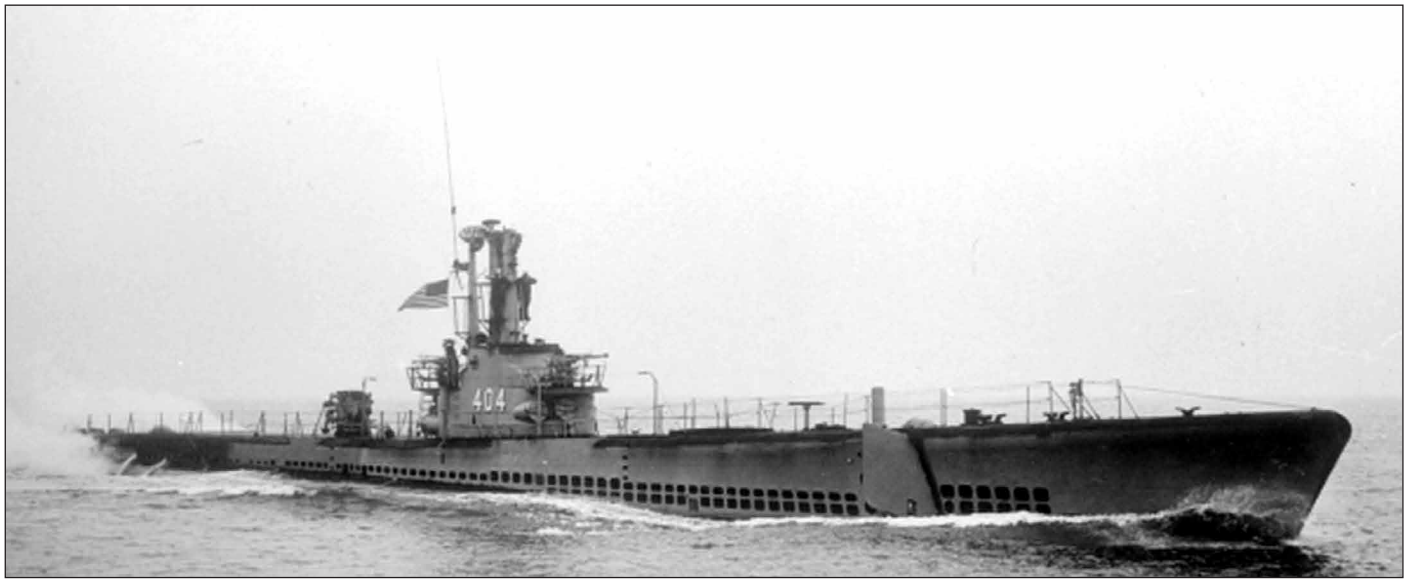
Eduardo demanded he be provided gunners to man his defenses. Agents told him to make his own arrangements with former Premier Antonio Miro Cardona of The Frente. Cardona did not agree with Garcia, but Garcia came up with a brilliant plan. He hired approximately 30 men who wanted to fight Castro and the same people considered arch-criminals by the rebel. As a final demand, Garcia declared he would be coming along on the expedition, "To be in charge of my ships."

From the Garcia Line, CIA took five cargo ships to transport Brigade men to the beach. Four of the vessels loaded with ammunition and supplies expected to support the men for 30 days. One vessel was designated to deliver 15 days' worth of supplies on the fifth day after the initial landing.

The Garcia ships took on the Brigade's provisions from New Orleans, on the US Gulf Coast, and sailed directly to Puerto Cabezas, Nicaragua. After arrival, ships' crews delivered Brigade men and equipment to the designated landing area. Each of the Garcia men was offered the opportunity to quit; however, only one captain and six crewmen resigned but were quickly replaced. Once in Puerto Cabezas, the ships were fitted with the machine guns requested by the owners.

Two other vessels included the *Blagar* and the *Barbara J,* both Landing Craft Infantry (LCI). The CIA owned these ships which contained hold areas that extended almost the length of the ship. The LCIs, docked in Key West, Florida, had been referred to by locals who spotted them as "ghost boats" for the black and gray coloring of the ships. One of the ghost boats the CIA used had been a submarine chaser in a previous life.

Each LCI consisted of officers, engineers and radio operators, all Americans attached to the Military Sea Transport Service. One of the Agency case officers reported the crew members of the LCIs to be civilian merchant marine sailors not trained for combat. Their concerns focused on the safety of their vessel. Smaller landing crafts carried light tanks, two-and-a-half ton trucks with trailers of ammunition and supplies, jeeps, water trailer and a tanker truck with aviation fuel. A US Navy Landing Ship Dock (LSD) transported the vessels and then handed them off to Brigade crews near the landing point. Aluminum and fiberglass boats equipped with outboard motors were flown to Puerto Cabezas to be loaded on the LCI.



USS *Spikefish,* a submarine of the US Navy deployed in the Caribbean to support the Brigade operation. (Albert Grandolini Collection)

7

EXILES IN TRAINING

Exile recruits trained at south Florida military bases and in Panama and Guatemala. Despite the original plan that the Brigade consisted of only anti-Castro exiles, some of the men recruited were known Batista supporters. When the Americans organized the Brigade men, all were searched for weapons and some found on the Batista men.

Recruits underwent infantry training at a CIA-operated base named JMTrax at Relalhulen on the Pacific Coast of Guatemala. Paratroop training took place at Garrapatenango, Guatemala. Brigadistas trained for gunnery and flight at JMadd at Rayo Base.

JMTide, nicknamed Happy Valley, located in the Central American tropics of Nicaragua, became a small air base complete with twelve-man tents, control tower, mess hall, chapel and command center. World War II era Douglas B-26B Invaders lined the ramp, and floodlights lit the area. Retired mechanics refurbished the old aircraft to be airworthy once again. The B-26Bs from the boneyard now resembled those of Castro's air force, down to the same *Fuerza Aerea Revolucionaria* (FAR) markings on the fuselages and tails. What Happy Valley lacked in creature comforts, it made up for with a well-equipped aircraft operation. The 6,200-foot-long concrete runway, though built during the Second World War by the US in defense of the Panama Canal, was still in good condition. One building announced its operation with a simple sign understandable in any language: BAR. As with most jungle locations, this one was home to a variety of scorpions, spiders, snakes and other dangerous creatures. A trip to the latrine or shower, both simple, basic structures, tended to be a hazardous trek. The Brigade pilots went to the mess hall and other locations on the base under guard by Americans with automatic weapons for protection.

The Cuban exiles called their operation Brigade 2506 in memory of a battalion member, Carlos Rafael Santana Estevez who died in a training accident in September 1960. The Agency wanted Castro's intelligence sources to believe there were more exiles than in reality; the identification numbers of the Brigade started at 2500. Years later the patriots with the lowest numbers were considered the honored elite of the exiles, those who signed on first.

The principal commanders of Brigade 2506 were:

Manuel Francisco Artime Buesa, Political Leader
Jose Alfredo "Pepe" Perez San Roman, Military Commander
Erneido Andres Oliva Gonzalez, Military Second in Command
Roman J. Ferrer Mena, Chief of Staff
Manuel Villafana Martinez, Commander of the Air Force
Alejandro del Valle Marti, 1st Paratroop Battalion Commander
Hugo Sueiro Rios, 2nd Infantry Battalion Commander
Noelio Montero Diaz, 3rd Infantry Battalion Commander
Valentin "Pipo" Bacallao Ponte, 4th Armored Battalion Commander
Ricardo Montero Duque, 5th Infantry Battalion Commander
Francisco Montiel Rivera, 6th Infantry Battalion Commander
Roberto Perez San Roman, (brother of Pepe), Heavy Gun Battalion Commander
Francisco Perez Castro, Infantry Battalion Commander
Enrique Ruiz-Williams
Higinio Nino Diaz

They arrived in Nicaragua on Douglas C-54 Skymaster cargo planes from training camps in Guatemala, and then transferred to their appointed ships at the end of the long pier near the city center. Training in boat handling and amphibious landings took place at Vieques Island, Puerto Rico. As the ships departed, the Brigade men lined the railings waving scarves with colors of their battalions. An odd sight on the pier stood dictator of Nicaragua, Luis Somoza, ally of the US, wearing a stark white suit waving to the ships while surrounded by his contingent of armed bodyguards.

A US State Department White Paper, an authoritative report, informed readers concisely about a complex issue and presented the issuing body's philosophy on the matter. The intent was to help readers understand an issue, solve a problem, offer recommendations or form a conclusion. The State Department developed such a document that declared Cuba a Soviet satellite. The report further stated that if Cuba broke ties with the Soviet Union, the US would provide aid as a free government. However, if Cuba continued to partner with the Soviet Union, the US threatened that Cuba was a "clear and present danger to the authentic and autonomous revolution of the Americas."

The plan directed the training for a project called the Bay of Pigs Invasion to be implemented in April 1961. In addition to the exiles, CIA Officer E. Howard Hunt, selected opposition leaders from Havana to establish and serve as the new government once Fidel was deposed. CIA liberally funded the exiles with Hunt distributing approximately $125,000 a month for accommodations and salaries. Intelligence led the exiles to believe that on 17 April 1961, after landing at Playa Giron, significant local support awaited there. CIA directly provided arms, boats and communication equipment for infiltration into Cuba. Deputy Director for Plans, Richard Bissell, anticipated Castro to be dead before the Bay of Pigs landing, but he forged ahead with the plan.

Although the US invasion plan had been designated Top Secret, *The New York Times,* reported on 7 April 1961 the US has been training paramilitary groups in Guatemala for an invasion of Cuba. Even Cuban Foreign Minister Raul Roa Garcia learned the US was training troops in Guatemala to invade Cuba. President Kennedy responded to the allegations in *The New York Times*, "First, I want to say there will not be, under any conditions, an intervention in Cuba by the United States Armed Forces."

While Brigade 2506 awaited their mission in Cuba, they experienced their first taste of combat. On 13 November 1960, while in Guatemala, Colonel Rafael Sessan Perieira, led an attack on the government of General Miguel Ydigoras Fuentes, and took Fort Matamoras. The soldiers objected to the US using Guatemala for an invasion of Cuba. Ydigoras appealed to the US for assistance and the US sent B-26B bombers piloted by Cuban exiles. Five days later President Eisenhower ordered the US Navy to protect Nicaragua and Guatemala. Another group seized military bases at Zapata and Puerto Barrios, the primary ports in the Caribbean. Brigade

2506's members volunteered to help the Guatemalan president and 200 men had been selected. They were issued weapons and driven to Retalhuler Air Base to board planes bound for Puerto Barrios. Brigade men kept their machine guns aimed at the jungle as they flew overhead.

With Agency concurrence and planning, 100 Brigadistas flew on three C-46s bound for Puerto Barrios to capture the airfield. The Cuban Liberation Air Force B-26B Invaders made a few passes over the base. One Brigadista observed: "It was incredible to watch from the hatch of our C-46 as the bombers dove, circled and dove again. One scored a direct hit on a truckload of rebel soldiers."

When the C-46 attempted to land for the men to exit the plane, fire from the rebels nearby forced the pilot to take to the air again and return to Rayo Base. The next day, the Guatemalan Defense Minister expressed his gratitude to the Brigadistas. He told them, "The rebels heard that one thousand armed and trained Cubans were en route with heavy military equipment. Then they surrendered without firing a single shot." Following the successful operation, all Brigadistas were granted honorary citizenship of Guatemala.

8
PLAN B

US Air Force Brigadier General John Gray received a call from Lieutenant General Earl (Buzz) Wheeler, Director of Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS). He directed General Gray to form a committee with four other officers to study the CIA plan on behalf of the JCS. Gray and his committee met to gather basic information with six Agency men dressed casually and offering only first names. Expecting to accept huge folders full of documents, Gray and his committee received not a single piece of paper. Everything the men told the committee was verbal, with only one map of Cuba. The committee took detailed notes and compiled them into a plan. The Trinidad Plan, as it became known, called for landing on the southern shore of Cuba at Trinidad south of the Escambray Mountains. Based on the Agency representatives' information, Gray's group concluded the "Brigade could last for up to four days." General Gray estimated the chances of success to be no more than fair. He also indicated the need for absolute air superiority. The committee's report sent to the President and Agency officials stated the chances of success were favorable but depended on political factors.

Their response: "To study in general hypothetical terms what might be done to unseat Castro." The committee made the following recommendations:

1. Economic warfare,
2. Naval blockade,
3. Infiltration of a guerrilla force with US backup,
4. Air and naval warfare with no invasion, and,
5. All out invasion.

The Committee concluded nothing less than #4 would work.

As plans and training proceeded, the coalition government of the exiles in Miami had not been effective. Intelligence sources inside Cuba offered conflicting estimates of public reaction to depose Castro. CIA planners almost unanimously agreed that a citizen uprising would break out after the Brigade landed, but the plans depended too much on local citizen participation. However, that theory contrasted with media coverage and reports from those who had visited Cuba recently. Their reports indicated Castro riding a surprising wave of popularity attributed to his land reform and nationalization of US businesses such as sugar plantations. In February 1961, Castro explained in a speech to his people socialism was being organized in Cuba.

The Agency plan required port and dock facilities had to move supplies quickly. Though the location appeared well situated, the small airfield at Trinidad could not support B-26B bombers. President Kennedy rejected the Trinidad Plan as it appeared US involvement would be too obvious. He preferred a less active location and a night landing. At the end of the meeting, Kennedy tasked all present to develop an alternate plan.

Additional factors not given significant consideration: Soviet weapons arrived almost daily in Cuba. Cuba's two thousand miles of coastline with keys, bays, coves and swamps made observation of the areas a nightmare. US had estimated training for Cuba's MiG pilots in Czechoslovakia would take at least six months; therefore, there would be fewer pilots available to fly defensive missions. However, once the MiG-trained pilots returned to Cuba, the chance of Brigadistas' success would then be slim. The invasion had to take place before they returned. Although artillery and anti-aircraft guns poured into Cuba from the Soviet Union, only a few Russian and Czech technicians arrived with them. Castro had urged the MiG training to be expedited.

President Kennedy was briefed on the changes to the plan and gave the CIA approval to implement. The Brigade operation was finally a "Go."

Washington, DC, Thursday, 2 February 1961

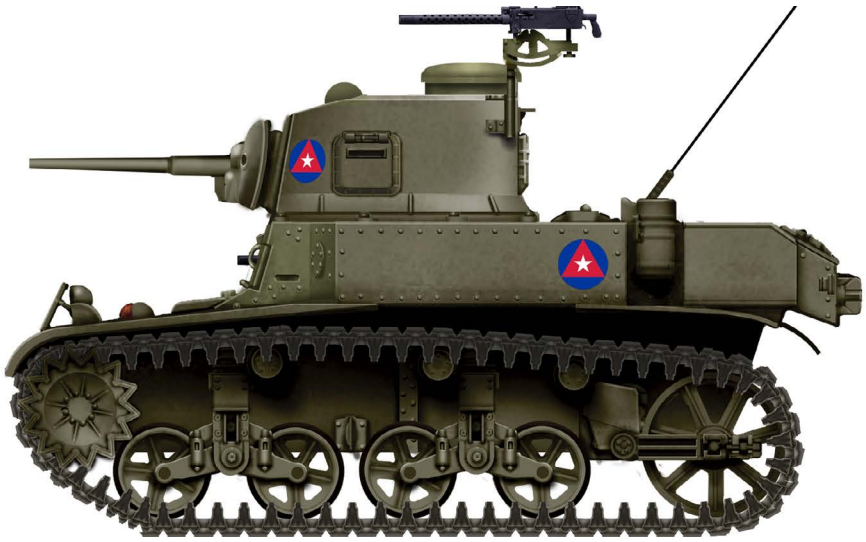
The JCS sent the White House and CIA Document JCSM-51-61, "Military Evaluation of the CIA Paramilitary Plan – Cuba." Success according to this plan depended on political factors and local citizen uprising to join the Brigade. Commandant of the Marine Corps, General David M. Shoup, believed the Brigade could accomplish their objective with air superiority and citizen uprising. Shoup felt more positive when he learned of the planned distribution of weapons to local dissidents. The Agency convinced him the 30,000 weapons would be given to the local Cubans who were pleading for arms. No consideration was expressed if less than a large contingent of locals came out to support the Brigadistas. This was not the first instance of the issue of local Cubans coming out to support the overthrow of Castro.

Bissell briefed the JCS in the Cabinet Room of the White House. General Gray thought Bissell's briefing lacked substance with no step-by-step direction for the logistics. The President listened and reminded Bissell, "Remember, I reserve the right to cancel this right up to the end."

Washington, DC, Saturday, 11 March 1961

Richard Bissell briefed the President and Cabinet members on the proposed landing near the Bay of Pigs. He explained it was a

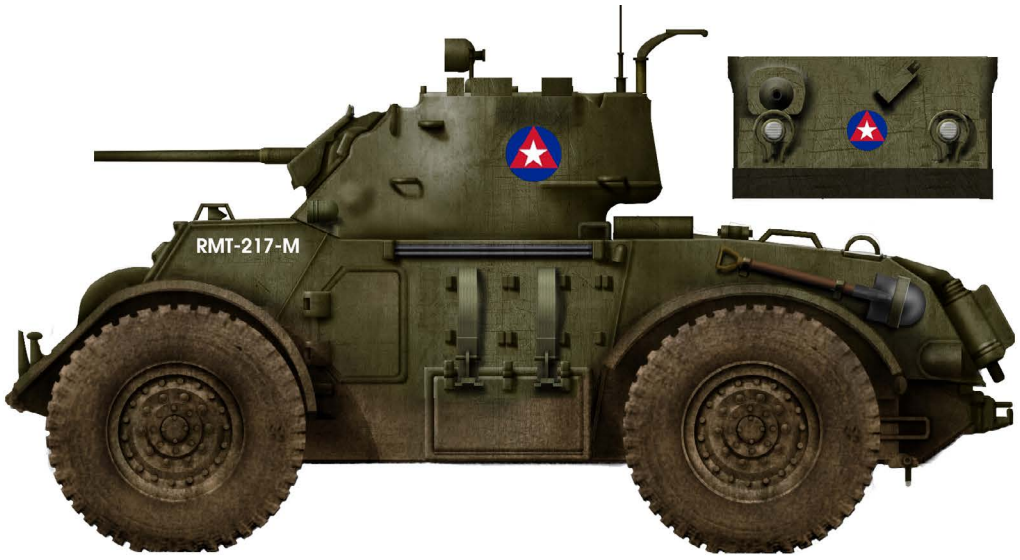
Open-topped jeeps – both in their original Willys M38 variant of the Second World War era, shown here, and the post-war Willys M38A1 version – were the primary military light utility vehicles of the Cuban armed forces. Large numbers were in service during the 1950s and many were captured by insurgents during the Cuban Revolution. As far as is known, all were left in Forest Green (FS34079) overall livery. Most examples operated by the army wore the Cuban roundel applied low on the forward body, right behind the fender. Examples captured by insurgents usually received inscriptions painted by brush on their sides and the engine cover. (Artworks by David Bocquelet)



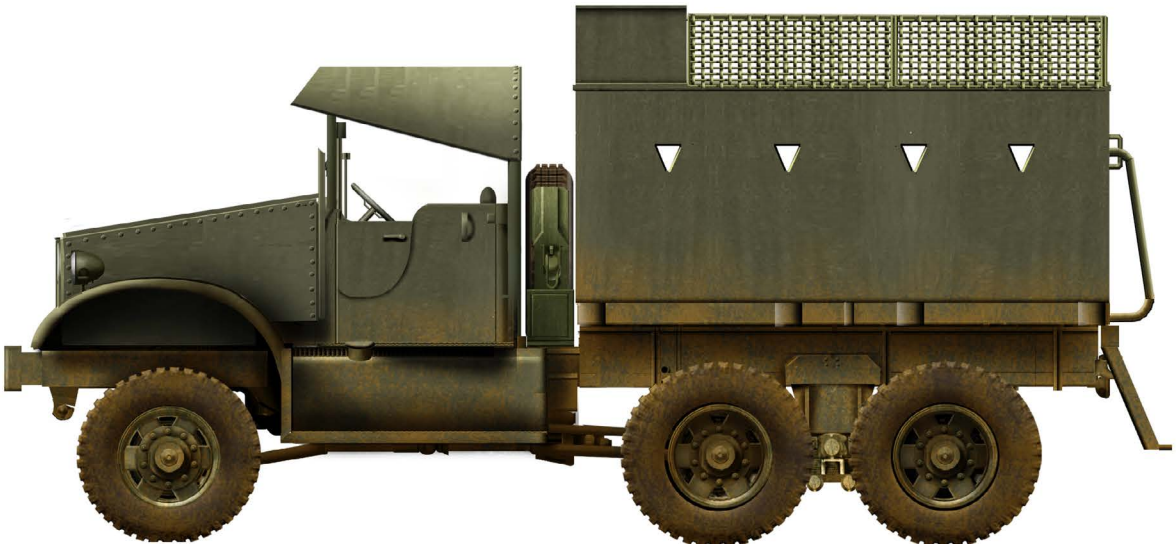
After officially declaring war on Germany, Cuba received 24 M3 Stuart light tanks under Lend Lease from the USA in 1942-1943. They saw heavy utilization during the fighting against the guerrillas of Fidel Castro, especially during the Battle of Guise, in Oriente in May 1958, when all the available examples were deployed against the group led by Che Guevara. All seem to have been painted in Forest Green overall. The Cuban roundel was usually applied at the rear of the hull side, and frequently accompanied by registrations starting with prefix RMT. (Artwork by David Bocquelet)

Concurrently with Stuarts, Cuba received at least seven M4 Sherman tanks. Gauging by photographs of these from the 1950s and 1961, all were equipped with the 76mm main gun and HVSS suspension and were left in Forest Green overall. The Cuban roundel was applied on the front sides of their turrets, and low on the front hull, while the registration – always prefixed with RMT – was applied high up the side of the hull. All available examples were deployed during the Battle of Santa Clara, in December 1958, where several were captured intact by insurgents. Seeking to replace losses, in mid-December 1958, Batista secured the delivery of 15 A34 Comet tanks from Great Britain, but it seems they saw little operational service before all were secured by the guerrillas. (Artwork by David Bocquelet)

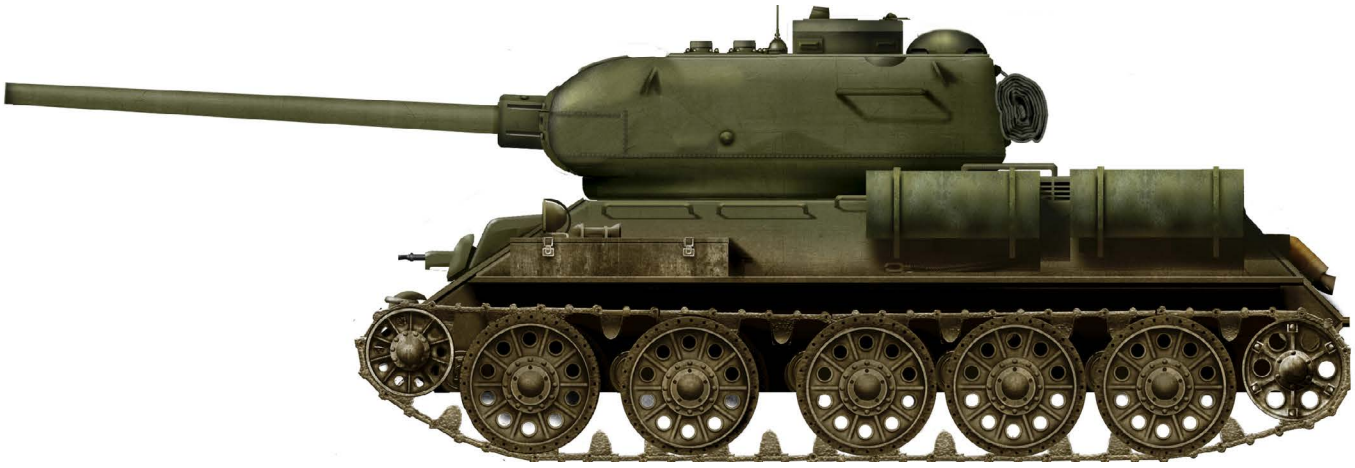
Although several M3 White Scout Cars can be seen in photographs of triumphant guerrillas entering Havana on 1 January 1959, next to nothing is known about their background. Available visual evidence has been reconstructed in this illustration, showing a vehicle painted in Forest Green (FS34079) overall, with Cuban roundels high up the center hull. (Artwork by David Bocquelet)



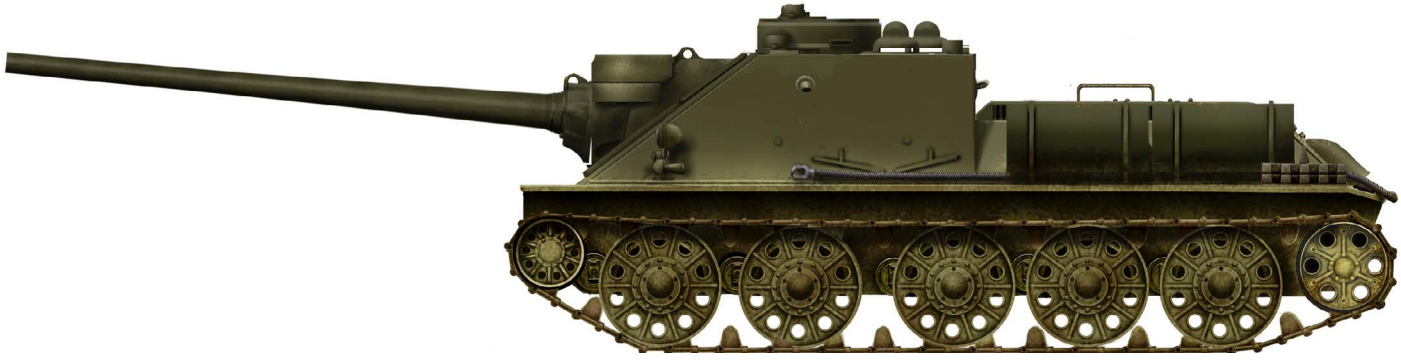
Due to pressure from Washington, when Batista was searching to strengthen the armored units of his army in 1956, he was forced to purchase 28 ex-Israeli T-17E1 Staghound armored cars from Nicaragua. The vehicles have an overall livery in a green color darker than Forest Green. As far as is known, all had the Cuban roundel applied on the center turret sides and front hull, and their registration was high on the forward hull side, in white. (Artwork by David Bocquelet)



Lack of armor prompted the Cuban Army of the late 1950s to develop several 'armored trucks', essentially reminiscent of what would be designated as the 'mine-resistant, ambush-protected' (MRAP) vehicle of modern times. Research indicates most were based on the chassis of Diamnod T968 4-ton 6x6 trucks, and had a relatively simple fighting compartment consisting of thick steel plate on the flat bed. The engine and the driver's cab were protected by additional armor plates. Some also had an armored position for a machine gun atop the cab. No color photographs of such vehicles are known, however, other available photographs indicate they were all painted either in Forest Green or Cuban Olive Drab overall. (Artwork by David Bocquelet)

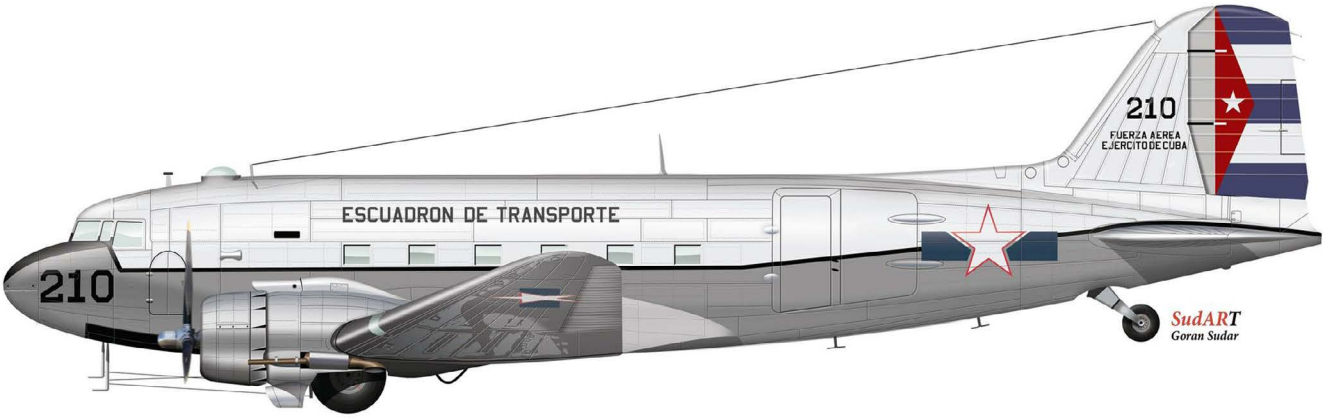


Bracing for a counter-invasion, and on the search for armament that would not be subjected to US sanctions, in October 1960 Castro managed to convince Moscow to deliver 125 T-34/85 medium tanks and 41 IS-2M heavy tanks. About 20 Cuban-operated T-34/85s saw heavy involvement against Brigade 2506 during the Bay of Pigs invasion, when five were knocked out and several damaged (the two regiments equipped with IS-2Ms were kept back as reserve). As far as is known, all the T-34s involved in the fighting of April 1961 were left in olive green overall, and wore no markings. (Artwork by David Bocquelet)



In addition to T-34/85s and IS-2Ms, the Soviets delivered the first batch of an eventual 100 SU-100 self-propelled anti-tank guns to Cuba in 1961. Essentially, this was the 100mm D-10 tank gun installed on the chassis of the T-34 in a casemate superstructure. Several of these became involved in fighting against Brigade 2506. Like the T-34/85s, all seem to have been painted in olive green overall and wore no markings. (Artwork by David Bocquelet)

During preparations for the invasion of the Bay of Pigs, the CIA provided Brigade 2506 with a platoon of five M41 Walker Bulldog light tanks drawn from US Army reserve stocks. Crews for them were trained at Fort Knox in March 1961, and they were disembarked in the Bay of Pigs by the single Landing Craft Mechanized on 17 April, all still in Forest Green overall livery, and wearing no insignia. Their first attack overran the defending Cuban militiamen, who lacked anti-tank weapons, and then annihilated an ill-advised counterattack, resulting in the so-called 'Slaughter of the Lost Battalion'. Late the same day, a better organized counterattack supported by two companies of T-34/85s resulted in a close-quarter battle in which at least two Soviet-made medium tanks were knocked out, a third disabled and a fourth captured by Brigade 2506. However, this success was short-lived, and all the five M41s ran out of ammunition by the following afternoon. (Artwork by David Bocquelet)

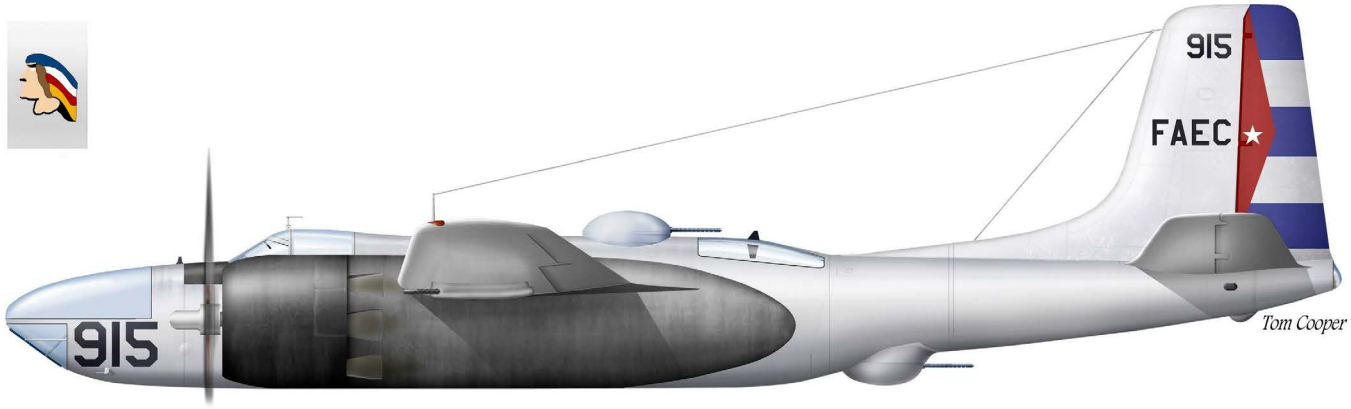


Established in 1913 as the Cuban Army Air Corps, and renamed the Cuban Army Air Force (*Fuerza Aérea Ejercito de Cuba*, FAEC) in April 1952, the Cuban air force was a seasoned and well-trained service. It experienced its most intensive period of growth during the 1940s, when, amongst others, it acquired a total of 10 Douglas C-47 transports (serials 200-204 and 206-2011). For most of their service life, these were painted as shown here, with top surfaces of the fuselage and the fin in white, wings and engine nacelles in aluminum and undersides of the fuselage in mid-gray. Notable is the large title of the unit operating them, the service title on the fin, and the application of the serial on the nose and the fin – all in black. National markings were worn in four positions. (Artwork by Goran Sudar)

The primary fighter-bomber of FAEC for most of the 1950s was the Republic P-47D Thunderbolt, 29 of which were delivered between May 1952 and June 1953 (serials 450 to 478). All were operated by the '10 of March' Fighter-Bomber Squadron (insignia shown inset). Initially, Cuban Thunderbolts were left in their aluminum overall livery and had 'anti-glare panels' in black applied in front of the cockpit. The full set of insignia consisted of roundels on the top of the left and bottom of the right wing, and either side of the fuselage, and the title FAEC on the fin, along with the serial applied on the covers of the undercarriage and the top of the fin. By 1957, about a dozen survivors were painted in the Cuban Olive Drab color overall and had their serials and service titles re-applied in yellow. None was left in operational condition by 1961. (Artwork by Tom Cooper)

In 1953, Havana acquired three de Havilland Canada DHC-2 Beaver light transports. As far as is known, all were painted in Cuban Olive Drab overall, and received serials 29, 30 and 31, usually applied in yellow on the fin, together with the service title. This example, serial 31, was unusual in so far as it was modified to serve as a gunship, through the removal of the side doors, and installation of a firing-position for a single 7.62mm Browning M2 machine gun. Together with B-26s, F-47s, T-33s and a miscellany of lighter aircraft, the Beaver was heavily involved in the Battle of Santa Clara. (Artwork by Tom Cooper)

Between June 1954 and August 1956, Cuba received a total of eight Lockheed T-33 Shooting Star two-seat conversion trainers from the USA (serials 701, 703, 705, 707, 709, 711, 713, and 715), pending possible deliveries of Republic F-84 Thunderjet fighter-bombers, which never materialized. Instead, two years later Washington offered 13 second-hand Lockheed F-80 Shooting Stars to Havana, to replace F-47s, but none were ever delivered. Cuban T-33As initially retained their 'bare metal overall' livery and wore national insignia on top of their left wing and the bottom of the right wing only. Several examples had their wing-tip mounted drop tanks painted in national colors, and undersides of their noses in yellow, as depicted here. Only seven were still operational as of early 1959, and that number had further decreased two years later. (Artwork by Tom Cooper)



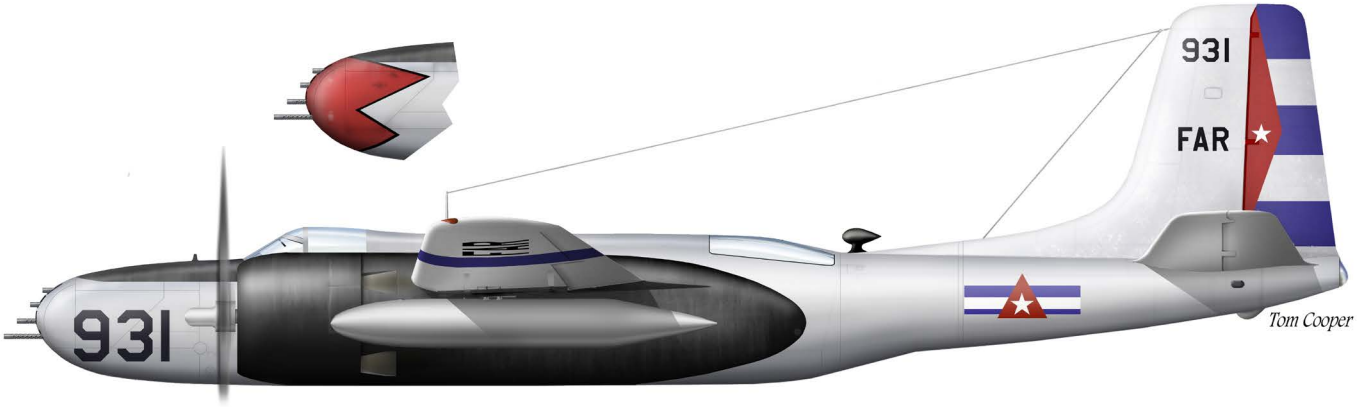
Starting in November 1956, the FAEC received 16 Douglas B-26B and B-26C Invader light bombers (serials 901, 903, 905, 907, 909, 911, 913, 915, 917, 919, 921, 923, 925, 927, 929, and 931), and one TB-26 conversion training aircraft (serial 933). Most were painted black overall, but by the late 1950s this color was replaced by aluminum (FS17178) overall, with anti-glare panels and engine nacelles in matt black (FS37038). Unit insignia – in the form of a sailor with a cap in national colors – was usually applied below the cockpit on the left side of the aircraft. By April 1961, five were in service: 909, 915, 917 (made emergency landing), 923 and 937. All retained their turrets with two machine guns and twin machine guns installed underwing. During the fighting in April 1961, the example shown here suffered damage from ground fire while flown by Jack Lagás and made an emergency landing. (Artwork by Tom Cooper)

The last major acquisition for the FAEC under Batista consisted of 15 Hawker Sea Fury FB.11 fighter-bombers (including serials 500, 505, 510, 530, 535, 540, 545, 550, 555, and 560), and two Sea Fury T.20 two-seat conversion trainers (575 and 580). Each was armed with four 20mm guns, launch rails for up to eight 127mm unguided rockets (four under each wing), and bomb capable. Initially, all were painted in high-speed silver finish overall and wore their serials applied in black below the rear part of the cockpit. They saw heavy involvement against Castro's guerrillas in the Battle of Santa Clara, by when several examples had the front of the engine cowling and the spinner painted in yellow. (Artwork by Tom Cooper)

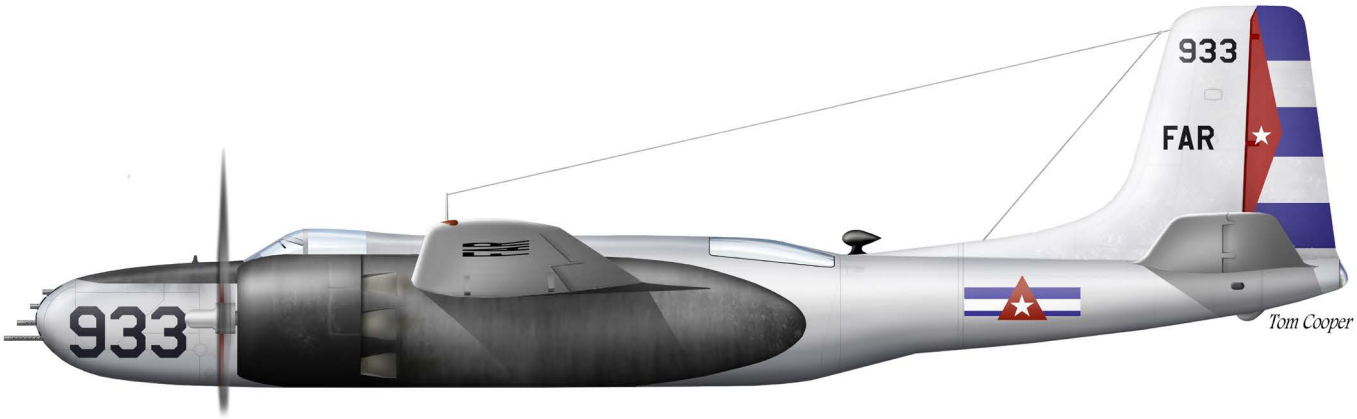
A total of 12 Sea Furies remained operational as of 1959, when the FAEC was renamed as the Revolutionary Air Force (*Fuerza Aérea Revolucionaria*, FAR). Four were still available as of April 1961, when all were re-painted in Cuban Olive Drab overall and received new service titles and new serials: 541, 542, 543 (probably indicating they were constructed through cannibalization of original aircraft) and 545. Pilots flying Sea Furies knocked out the supply ship SS *Houston*, shot down at least three of the Liberation Air Force's B-26Bs, and knocked out one of Brigade 2506's tanks. This example was shot down by anti-aircraft defenses while flown by Lieutenant Carlos Ulloa, a Nicaraguan, and involved in air combat with one of the Invaders over the Bay of Pigs. (Artwork by Tom Cooper)

Purges between 1959 and 1961, left the FAR with only seven pilots for its B-26s, Sea Furies and T-33As, three of whom were experienced, but none of whom flew often or had any kind of tactical training prior to the showdown of April 1961. They were reinforced by three Nicaraguans and one Chilean. Many were cross-qualified and flew whatever was available. To their luck, the CIA's poor intelligence resulted in dissipation of the counter-air effort, and thus poor results of attacks on Cuban air bases, while their ground crews were performing miracles. Although only two Sea Furies were available on the evening of 15 April, their number was to increase over the following days, significantly strengthening the FAR. This is a reconstruction of the Sea Fury 541 based on a photograph from 1964 by when national markings were applied. (Artworks by Tom Cooper)

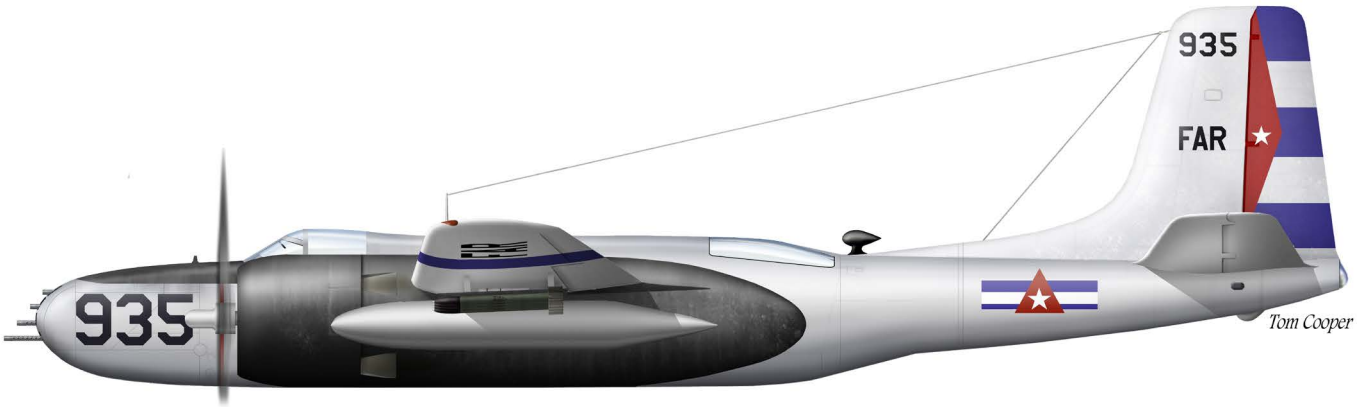
Due to the lack of spares and ground personnel qualified to maintain them, all T-33As of the FAR were grounded by early 1961. Six were made operational before and during the invasion and received a camouflage pattern of Cuban Olive Drab and gray-green on upper surfaces and sides. Undersides were left in the original bare metal. Five took part in hostilities: 703 (survived), 707 (shot down while flown by Orestes Acosta on 15 April); 709, 711 (the most active and most successful of FAR's jets), and 713. 715 was destroyed in the first air strike on San Antonio de los Banos AB, on 15 April. In return, they badly damaged two supply ships of Brigade 2506, shot down one B-26B and damaged another on 15 April, and shot down two Invaders on 20 April. (Artwork by Tom Cooper)



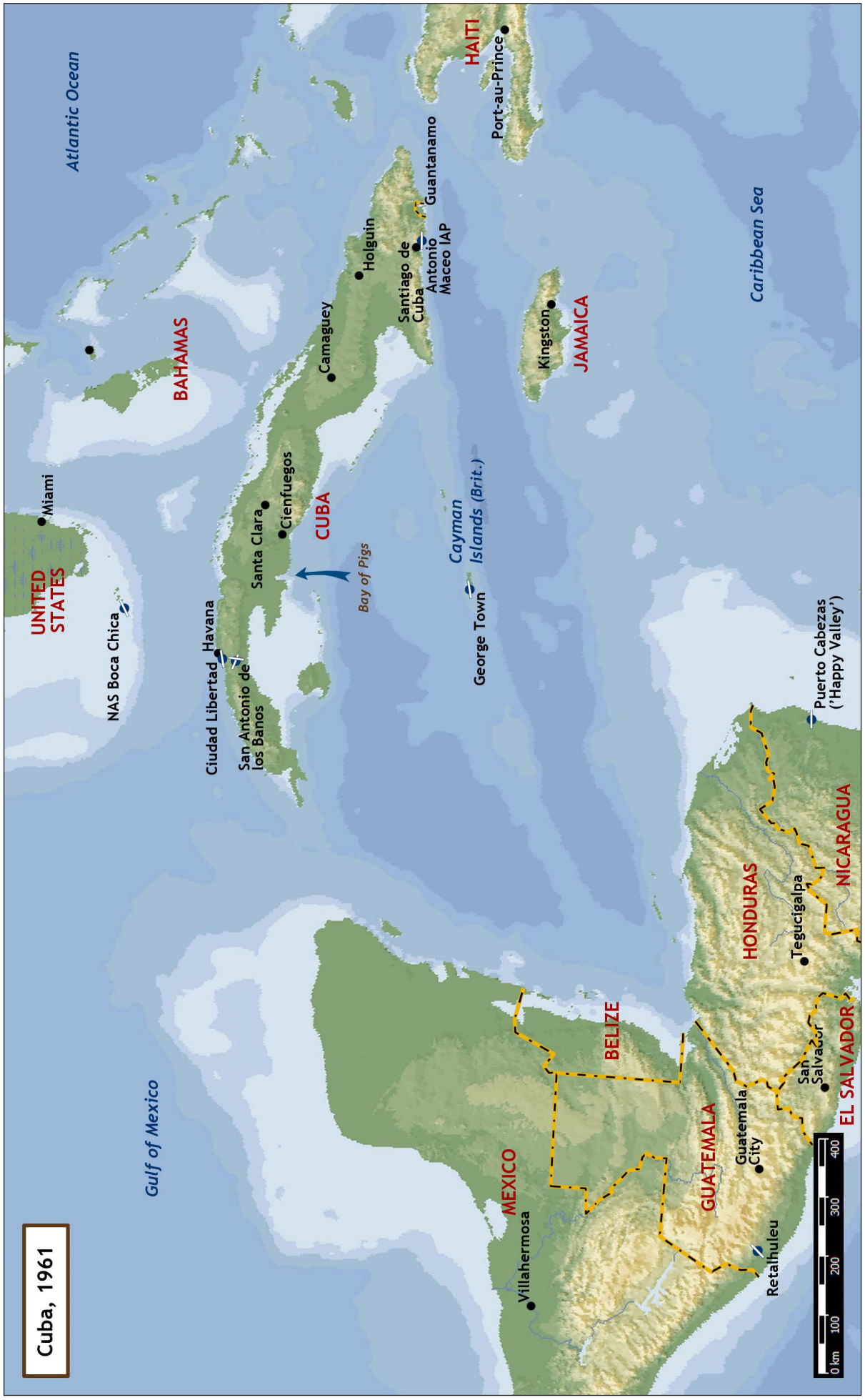
Out of a miscellany of some 20 B-26Bs provided by the CIA to the Guatemalan and Liberation Air Forces, at least 12 were to see action over Cuba. Their crews were initially trained at the air base codenamed JMMadd (known to Brigade 2506 as 'Rayo Base') outside Retalhuleu, in Guatemala, which had a 1,463m (4,800ft) long paved runway. After concluding their training, the Cuban-operated B-26s were re-deployed to Puerto Cabezas in Nicaragua in March 1961. By this time they had their rear-firing turrets removed to save weight, and a few had received personalized insignia, as shown inset: the future 'FAR931', flown by Gustavo Ponzoa, received a nose in red, outlined in black and (on the right side of the nose), inscription VI-RA-TE, which stood for first letters of his wife and children's names. (Artwork by Tom Cooper)



This was the B-26B that faked a defection to Miami on the morning of 15 April 1961. Documentation released in recent years indicates that the CIA went to great lengths to mark B-26s of the Liberation Air Force as closely to those of the FAR as possible. Correspondingly, they went into action wearing large black three-digit serial numbers on the nose and the top of the fin, FAR titles and national insignia in proper positions. Only their 'solid' noses (as opposed to the glazed-noses on FAR B-26Cs) and a blue strip applied around each wing just outboard of the underwing launch rails (not applied on this aircraft for obvious reasons) identified them as operated by the Liberation Air Force. (Artwork by Tom Cooper)



The B-26Bs started all their missions over Cuba heavily loaded, carrying a maximum capacity of ammunition for the eight guns in the nose nose, a pair of drop tanks and eight unguided rockets. The original plan envisaged a swift capture of Giron airport, so they could land to refuel and re-load ammunition, making the carriage of heavy drop tanks unnecessary. FAR935 was flown by Captain Mario Zuniga and Oscar Vega in air combat with the Sea Fury flown by Carreras Rolas over the burning SS *Houston* and SS *Rio Escondido* on 15 April. When his aircraft was damaged by hard maneuvering, Zuniga was forced to divert to Grand Cayman. The aircraft returned to action two days later, when flown by Matías Farías and Eddie González. Badly damaged by T-33A 711, it crashed during an attempted landing at Giron. Ultimately, the Liberation Air Force lost 10 out of its 12 B-26Bs. (Artwork by Tom Cooper)


Cuba, 1961
Atlantic Ocean
Gulf of Mexico
Caribbean Sea
UNITED STATES
Miami
NAS Boca Chica
BAHAMAS
CUBA
Havana
Ciudad Libertad
San Antonio de los Banos
Santa Clara
Cienfuegos
Camaguey
Bay of Pigs
Holguin
Santiago de Cuba
Antonio Maceo IAP
Guantanamo
HAITI
Port-au-Prince
Cayman Islands (Brit.)
George Town
JAMAICA
Kingston
Puerto Cabezas ('Happy Valley')
MEXICO
Villahermosa
BELIZE
GUATEMALA
Guatemala City
Retalhuleu
HONDURAS
Tegucigalpa
San Salvador
EL SALVADOR
NICARAGUA
0 km
100
200
300
400

considerable distance from Castro's troops and aircraft. One main road could be severed by destroying a single bridge.

When Jake Engler learned Trinidad had been replaced as a landing site, he seriously considered resigning from the project. He believed the plan had become dangerously out of control. A substitute location had to be identified quickly. Three alternatives presented to General Gray's committee had potential: The north coast of Oriente Province; the south coast between Trinidad and Cienfuegos; and the Zapata swamps near the Bay of Pigs. The nearby airstrip could accommodate the B-26Bs and there were access roads.

After four days, the JCS approved a plan to land on the coast of Matanzas Province near Bahia de Cochinos (Bay of Pigs). The area had few access roads, but without port facilities, the force would have to arrive from landing ships in the open sea. The estimated 4,900-foot runway had only 4,100 feet of usable runway. Considered long enough to support the B-26B operations, that part of the plan remained unchanged. However, the Bay of Pigs location cost the Brigadistas the ability to move into the Escambray Mountains and assume guerilla warfare tactics. The distance to the mountains was too great and would take the Brigade through populated areas. The JCS still did not advise the President about this issue. Red flag.

Lacking a study of the guerrilla option, JCS relied on Agency assurances that they operated in the area. However, no one pointed out guerrillas had not operated in the Zapata area since the early 1900s. Another red flag.

In mid-March, the Cuban government in exile had yet to be firmly established, though Eisenhower had requested it be done months earlier. CIA negotiator Howard Hunt favored Manuel Artime and dismissed other potential leaders. In one of Bissell's meetings, he asked for nominees who could be part of the new Cuban government. Colonel J. C. King, CIA Western Hemisphere leader offered, "What about Tony Varona? He was a former vice president of Cuba and head of the Cuban Senate." Suggestions for ways to identify potential candidates ran the gamut of serious to downright ridiculous.

> King offered, "Why don't we get four or five of these Cubans together? Don't they have conventions in Miami, or something like that? Surely there are some in the area."
>
> Hunt asked, "Well, are we going to let the Cuban underground be notified?"
>
> Colonel Hawkins adamantly opposed advising the Cubans at all. "If we tell them, it'll be all over town. Hell, the whole goddamn island knows about it now."

The Agency Cuban Task Force scheduled landings at the Bay of Pigs for early April. Bissell became impatient and ordered Jim Noble to get to Miami right away. Noble met with Howard Hunt and advised him Bissell had fired him off the team. That would not be the last of E. Howard Hunt. Noble's assistant, Will Carr, a New York engineer, came onboard. He had lived in Mexico and spoke fluent Spanish without accent. Carr was also a skillful negotiator and had worked for the Agency on prior projects in Latin America.

Noble and Carr met with Tony Varona, Manuel Artime and Manuel Ray. The Agency men had tagged Ray as a Communist and reported it up the chain of command. Internal fighting and conflicting opinions increased to the point Noble delivered a pointed script to Carr to be delivered to the Cubans in his eloquent Spanish, "If you don't come out of this meeting with a committee, you can just forget the whole fucking business because we are finished."

Noble's effort to unite the Cuban exile leaders finally paid off, but with somewhat different effect. Tony Varona announced, "We have forces to overthrow Castro." Jose Miro Cardona, President of the new Cuban Revolutionary Council, said, "The group will be transformed into a provisional government once it gains a military foothold in Cuba." The Task Force had not shared details of the planned invasion with the Council. Another red flag.

Beginning in early 1961 Cuban refugees arrived in Florida at a rate of 1,700 each week fleeing the Castro regime. They came in airplanes, boats, rafts and anything else that would float. Incoming travelers were interviewed for tidbits of intelligence. Director of the CIA Field Office in Miami, Jay Gleichauff, listened to hundreds of refugees before he heard a single nugget of usable information. He notified Washington he heard that 50 Cuban pilots were training in Czechoslovakia to fly MiGs for Castro and the Soviets were supplying him with Komar-class missile boats to guard the coast. The Miami agent compiled a list of 700 anti-Castro groups in and around Miami. The traffic in and out of Biscayne Bay increased to a degree that the Coast Guard could not be certain if it stopped a "CIA sponsored operation" or more "wild Cubans" floating in. When uncertain, Coast Guard personnel woke Gleichauff in the early hours to confirm which side they were on.

As Bissell's team grew, so too did the complexity of the plan. The CIA organized a rental car agency as a subsidiary of an established company. Gleichauff dispersed cars and trucks all over Miami and ensured license numbers did not follow in sequence. The Agency continued to stress the need for secrecy, but newspapers throughout the US ran photos of Cubans lined up at recruiting stations and local citizens watched the nightly departure of blacked out airplanes from Miami International Airport.

Rear Admiral John A. Clark thought, "The operation might succeed because of its sheer brazenness." In the last week of March, Clark was summoned to the office of Admiral Dennison to hear a briefing about Eduardo Garcia's navy. USS *Essex,* aircraft carrier Landing Helicopter Dock (LHD), would escort five of Garcia's cargo ships, *Caribe, Atlantico, Houston, Rio Escondido* and *Lake Charles,* to the rendezvous point outside the Bay of Pigs. All hull numbers had been painted out. Clark's job was to ensure the Brigade members made it safely to the beaches, but he was prohibited from firing a single shot unless in self-defense.

Machine guns installed on the *Atlantico* used for training encountered a problem. A poorly welded deck plate broke when a gun fired through the deck. One man was killed and two wounded. The captain, breaking radio silence, requested help and the USS *Eaton* took the wounded onboard for treatment.

Captain S. S. Searcy of the USS *Essex,* was proud his vessel and crew would play a role in the plan to destroy Castro. His orders were to take the *Essex* from Quonset Point, Rhode Island to Norfolk, Virginia. At Norfolk, Admiral John Clark and Chief of Staff Captain Edward Fickenscher, Jr. boarded the *Essex* and delivered a brown, sealed envelope to Searcy containing his Top Secret operational orders. In his cabin Searcy ordered his executive officer, navigator, chief engineer and air operations officer to meet and review the orders.

The USS *Eaton,* a Fletcher-class destroyer built in the US, was led by Captain Robert Crutchfield, the senior officer closest to the beach at Bay of Pigs. He commanded a five-ship destroyer force. The

Navy did not give credit for improvision unless to better complete a mission, but Crutchfield knew the old manual search lights on his ships "could become a critical handicap." Within two days, the signal lights on the destroyers had been connected to radar via sound-power telephones.[1] However, Crutchfield and his crew drew circles on the decks with chalk to indicate directional bearings. During the two nights until meeting Garcia's navy, the *Eaton* practiced with the destroyer USS *Murray.* The *Eaton* would lead Brigade ships into the Bay of Pigs and the *Murray* would guard the rear.

Commander William J. Forgy was Executive Officer of Fighter Squadron VA-34 known as *Blue Blasters*, from Cecil Field Naval Air Station at Jacksonville, Florida. Orders directed 12 A-4D2 Skyhawk jets to fly to the aircraft carrier *Essex* on 4 April 1961 for anti-submarine warfare exercises. Neither Forgy nor anyone else in the squadron knew what the orders *really* directed. Task Force Commander, Admiral John Clark, met the pilots in the Ready Room and reported "they were going on some sort of operation in the Caribbean," but he did not have the details yet. Somebody expressed a theory the squadron might be doing some shooting. One of the pilots theorized maybe something in Haiti, Dominican Republic or Cuba.

Jake Engler met with Agency officers Grayston (Gray) Lynch and William (Rip) Robertson in Key West. At that time, Engler told the men, "The Brigade is going to invade Cuba," but he had no details yet about where or when. They were to be the only Americans on site as the invasion rolled out.

Lynch, a native of Victoria, Texas, had a distinguished career, as a US Army captain. He served at Normandy and the Battle of the Bulge, Heartbreak Ridge in Korea and in Laos with the Special Forces. For his outstanding service, Lynch received three Purple Hearts, two Silver Stars and one Bronze Star with a V for Valor. He joined the CIA in 1960 and was immediately assigned to the Cuba Task Force.

Rip Robertson also a tall, strong Texan, served as a captain in the US Marines in the Second World War and later in Korea. Rip had made a name for himself in clandestine services at the Agency.[2]

Now assigned to the Agency's ships, Gray to the *Blagar* and Rip to the *Barbara J.,* the two officers' missions directed them to oversee the Bay of Pigs invasion and report back to Washington in real time. The *Blagar* designated as the lead vessel, would carry armaments for 1,000 men. The *Barbara J.* followed and carried weapons for 500 men.

Puerto Cabezas, Nicaragua, 1 April 1961, D minus 16

Gray and Rip arrived in Puerto Cabezas with the LCIs, but they had not been told of the change of landing site from Trinidad to Zapata/Bay of Pigs. The change also necessitated additional landing equipment; the original fleet of three LCUs (Landing Craft, Utility) and four LCVPs (Landing Craft, Vehicle and Personnel) would be insufficient.

In Washington, Bissell and his team quickly purchased and transported thirty-six 18-and-a-half-foot aluminum boats with new outboard motors. Coordinating with the ships' crews, Gray and Rip worked non-stop to complete the installation by 10 April when senior Agency and Pentagon staff arrived to brief the group.

Gray was knowledgeable of tanks and knew Castro had Stalin II heavy tanks which would be sitting ducks for the Brigade's air-to-ground rockets. It sounded like a piece of cake. The Brigade had only to carve out a bridgehead large enough to keep Castro's artillery from reaching Playa Giron airstrip where the B-26Bs would operate.

A CIA memorandum recommended preparations of the landing area: "The Cuban air force and naval vessels capable of opposing our landing must be knocked out and neutralized before amphibious shipping makes its final run to the beach." However, a bureaucratic battle of its own reached near breaking point. The CIA wanted maximum air power; State Department wanted it kept to a minimum. The President had his own thoughts on the limitation of air strikes which he continued to express. The argument between departments continued until D Day.

Gray studied the U-2 spy plane reconnaissance photographs from Washington. He looked carefully at a dark mass under water near the beach. The CIA photographic interpreter worked with specialized equipment to enhance the images and identify more details. Gray questioned the photo interpreter about the dark mass. "Seaweed," replied the interpreter confidently.

At the Brigade briefing by Colonel Frank, aerial photos displayed showed Blue Beach. Juan Sordo, a Brigade doctor, was intimately familiar with the area in the photographs.

> "Those are coral reefs," Sordo announced.
>
> "I beg to differ; it is seaweed," Frank replied.
>
> "And I beg to differ with *you*," said Sordo. "I know that area and it is stupid to attempt to get vessels through there. The depth there is only three feet over the reefs."
>
> A second Brigade member, Jose Alonso, expressed his opinion that the sea was "too shallow in the area."
>
> Gray challenged, "The experts said it was acceptable."
>
> Alonso responded emphatically, "This is *my* country and this *is* a coral reef. The photo has been interpreted incorrectly."

The Agency's refusal to accept Sordo's and Alonso's explanations of the coral reef became a major flaw in their plan. Another red flag.

Additional Brigade doctors arrived from Miami. They believed they had been assigned to a hospital ship then learned there was none. They expected to be needed for troops wounded during battle. When the doctors learned there was no hospital ship, some promptly returned to Miami. Some remained to support the Brigade on the beach landing.

Palm Beach, Florida, Tuesday, 4 April 1961, D minus 13

Kennedy and his entourage departed Palm Beach to return to Washington, DC at 1630. He had already scheduled a meeting of the Cuban Task Force in the White House later in the evening. Senator Fulbright, who had returned on Air Force One with the President, was invited to attend the meeting. Fulbright felt out of place and was reluctant to attend, but Kennedy had put him on the spot by asking his opinion. The Task Force members resented Fulbright's presence there bringing up old issues they had already covered.

In a completely unexpected method of determining how the men of the Task Force stood on the operation, Kennedy asked all present for a simple "Yes" or "No" vote. Though several of those present later said they believed the plan to be badly flawed, they closed ranks and all voted to proceed. The men of the New Frontier did not want to appear soft or weak, especially in front of their peers. They were eager to impress the President and most especially each other.

Before the meeting concluded, Kennedy expressed his interest in having small units to invade Cuba, 200 to 250 troops. Even when cautioned by his military experts about this idea, he left the room warning he wanted to consider the issue again the next day.

Secretary Rusk remained silent; he had great concern for the protocol of the meeting. Like other occasions when present at large meetings, Rusk waited until he was alone with the President to voice his opinions. The Secretary later admitted he knew the plan would not work based on his experience in the US Army as a colonel in the Second World War in the Far East. He shared a concern that the plan violated international law, and it could be concluded the US was involved. Rusk understood the Brigade "did not stand a snowball's chance in hell of success."

Jack Hawkins said the Brigade was ready. The question surfaced, "Suppose the Brigade can't establish a beachhead?" Bissell brushed the question aside as unimportant and displayed a map of the Bay of Pigs and Escambray Mountains. Another question raised, "How do we know the Cuban people will support the Brigade?" Bissell told the group he believed there was no wave of rebellion among the population. Another red flag.

Washington, DC, Wednesday, 5 April 1961, D minus 12

Kennedy asked his Special Assistant, Arthur Schlesinger to meet briefly. The President asked his assistant's opinion of the invasion. Schlesinger honestly answered he thought it was a very bad idea. Kennedy only shook his head but did not answer or respond.

Schlesinger wrote a memo for the President coherently detailing his argument against the invasion. Despite the President's assurances to Schlesinger the invasion was not a done deal, he did permit the operation planning to continue.

Donald Wilson, Deputy Director of US Information Administration, met with a reporter friend, Tad Szulc, for lunch. During the conversation, Szulc asked, "What arrangements are being made to brief reporters about the invasion?" Unable to believe what he heard, Wilson raced back to the office to talk with his boss, the Director, Edward R. Murrow, himself a well-known reporter. He shared the question Szulc had asked; what was really going on? Murrow shouted, "Get me Allen Dulles" and a short time later that day the two men sat in the Agency Director's office.

Washington, DC, Friday, 7 April 1961, D minus 10

The more Schlesinger learned about the invasion, the more he believed the President had already made his decision to proceed.

Washington, DC, Saturday, 8 April 1961, D minus 9

Bissell scheduled a meeting of his team at 1300 in Jake Engler's office. Kennedy accepted Agency assurances that the Brigade could make it to the security of the Escambray Mountains, approximately 80 miles from the beach. Another red flag. Guarantees from Dulles and Bissell had done their job in Kennedy's mind; Bissell had quick answers for everything.

Members of the Cuba Task Force felt the project seriously out of control, but most were too insecure to voice an opinion and call attention to their own opinions. B-26Bs were too slow, range too short, landing site changed from Trinidad, expedition too large and command and control inadequate. As it stood, the politicians' requirements were making it impossible to succeed. All members of the Task Force concurred that they must protect the character of the President of the US.

To Schlesinger, the Cuban Revolutionary Council (CRC) posed a weak link. The Council expected to be recognized as the new government of Cuba when the Brigade hit the beach. However, Agency planners declared adamantly recognition would come only when the Brigade had more than a 50 percent chance of success. The President demanded to know "if the Council understood the ground rules." As with other issues, the Task Force did not elaborate on how much they shared with the CRC.

JCS General David Gray received a dismal report from the logistics expert, Marine Colonel Tucker Gougelmann, who went to Nicaragua to assess the preparation. Gougelmann had been consulted for his expertise in ground troop operations and logistics. After surveying the base, his report to JCS was less than positive. He reported the troops were totally inadequate, gasoline loaded adjacent to explosives, and insufficient fuel for the mission. In the expert's opinion, it appeared logistically the operation would fall apart. The Agency officers in Nicaragua found Gougelmann rude and brusque, and refused to take his advice seriously. Another red flag.

Due dates for a number of actions had come and gone without completion. The President delayed D Day from 10 April to 17 April. Secretary of Defense McNamara and the JCS met at the White House to emphasize the "absolute necessity" of air supremacy. General Gray stressed this urgently and requested a full military briefing; however, there was never such an update. Bissell laid out a detailed timetable. The first troop ships had already departed Nicaragua at D minus 6. The last ship would leave on Thursday at D minus 4. On Saturday, D minus 2 Nino Diaz would make a diversionary landing at Oriente. Simultaneously air strikes by three groups of Brigade B-26Bs would hit Castro's three air bases. Lastly, two alleged defector pilots would land their B-26Bs in southern Florida to give the impression the strikes originated in Cuba.

General Gray left the meeting frustrated and discouraged. Too much time was spent on political issues and not enough on the military logistics. Kennedy still had not approved the operation and Bissell emphasized the "Go/No Go" time for Diaz to land at Oriente was noon on Friday. With that last bit of information, the President simply nodded, not approval or disapproval.

President Kennedy gave Richard Bissell conditional approval to proceed with the planned invasion. It had been considered the last chance to overthrow Castro by the efforts of the exiles. Timing was also critical to achieve their goal before weapons from the Soviets and Communist bloc entered the fray. Additionally, the Brigade would be a political liability if they had not taken a strong lead. Kennedy expected the Brigade could "turn guerrilla" to reinforce the resistance movement on the island. Another red flag.

The ships sailed from the US ports at 0100 on 9 April bound for Nicaragua. En route the CIA leaders set up targets for the Brigade troops who had never fired a machine gun. The voyage turned out to be a noisy event with the gunnery practice at night aimed at brightly painted kites bought at a toy store in Key West.

The propaganda program developed by the CIA implemented Radio Swan and 11 other Agency stations to broadcast a blitz of information including coded orders for operatives inside Cuba. The Brigade Liberation Air Force planned a leaflet drop though determined less effective than bombs.

9

START OF THE INVASION

Guatemala and Nicaragua, Monday, 10 April 1961, D minus 7

The base commander at Camp Trax in Guatemala received the mobilization order. The Brigade then moved to Puerto Cabezas, Nicaragua. CIA leaders finally briefed Brigade commanders of the detailed battle plan for the first time.

Three landing zones designated for Operation Zapata: Playa Larga (Red Beach), Giron/Bay of Pigs (Blue Beach) and 20 miles east of Giron at Green Beach. With this plan, Brigade troops would control 40 miles of coast from Red Beach to Green Beach. Giron would function as the center of the operation. Pepe San Roman, commander at Blue Beach, was assigned to maintain communication with the Agency ships, *Blagar* and *Barbara J.* Paratroop Battalion Commander, Alejandro del Valle, established his command post at San Blas. Erneido A. Oliva, commanded the 2nd and 5th Infantry Battalions which would land at Red Beach.

During the briefing, Brigade members asked if they could expect any interference from Castro's air force. The response reassured them; Castro's aircraft would be destroyed by ground troops as they sat on the airfield. They discussed no alternate plan or even part of another plan communicated to the Cubans. Agency officials believed if the Cuban exiles knew of another plan, they would be weakened when things got rough. After the briefing, the Cubans felt confident.

Happy Valley, Nicaragua, Wednesday, 12 April 1961, D minus 5

At the Nicaraguan training base, nicknamed Happy Valley, B-26B Brigade pilot Gustavo Ponzoa, waited for his mission, excited, nervous and anxious. A former Cubana Airlines pilot, Ponzoa had never flown in combat and his only bomb drops had been two quick practice runs. He had been assigned to Santiago de Cuba, 450 miles southeast of Havana, a route he had flown weekly with Cubana Airlines. He knew the area well.

Ponzoa received his briefing from Joe Shannon of the Alabama National Guard. With a magnifying glass, Gustavo studied every inch of the U-2 reconnaissance photos over the Santiago de Cuba Airport where two T-33s and three B-26Cs and several small aircraft sat on the ramp. A briefer called "George" told Ponzoa not to attack any targets except planes on the ground and the fuel tank. Gustavo considered the Texaco refinery nearby as a great target, but George cautioned him to attack only the areas he had been briefed for, no additional ones.

Ponzoa's mission against Santiago de Cuba was scheduled for takeoff at 0225. He and Joe pre-flighted every part of the B-26B. Aircraft #929 carried two 500-pound demolition bombs, ten 260-pound fragmentation bombs, eight machine guns with 2,800 rounds and eight rockets, four under each wing. Like other Brigade planes, Ponzoa's B-26B carried markings like the FAR.

Gustavo's wingman in #933, Gonzalo Herrera, waited beside his own assigned aircraft. The two pilots launched their aircraft without problems and arrived together over Kingston, Jamaica 10 minutes ahead of schedule. They circled the area to kill time for arrival at the target airports simultaneously.

Puerto Cabezas, Thursday, 13 April 1961, D minus 4

The *Blagar* and *Barbara J.,* carrying troops and equipment, left Puerto Cabezas in the evening of 13 April 1961. Destination: The Bay of Pigs, Cuba. While en route, troops changed from their khaki uniforms into camouflage combat fatigues.

Smoking onboard was strictly forbidden because of the proximity to the fuel and ammunition. The carrier USS *Essex* led the group of the five Garcia freighters to the rendezvous point south of the Bay of Pigs. The *Essex* had not been tasked with anything beyond ensuring the Brigade troops made it to the beach.

Nino Diaz and 160 reconnaissance troops prepared to carry out a diversionary landing east of Guantanamo Bay. When they approached the coast, they identified what they suspected to be cigarettes on the shore smoked by Castro's men. They aborted the mission and returned to the ship where they waited to try again the next night. This failure of the raid had a profound effect on the success of the actual invasion; the plan had been to draw Castro's forces east and confuse his command structure.

The Chief of Operations, Luis Cosme, asked for a Brigade volunteer for a special flight. Mario Zuniga, a former pilot in the Cuban Air Force, had flown the B-26C. Zuniga was briefed by a US Navy pilot named "Chuck" who told him not to discuss his mission or this operation with anyone for five years and he should make himself scarce after the mission. Chuck practiced the story frequently to be certain Zuniga had the details firm in his mind.

Dressed in green pants, white t-shirt and baseball cap, Zuniga launched for the four-and-a-half-hour flight to Miami. His B-26B prominently displayed the FAR insignia and the Cuban star. Upon landing in Miami, Zuniga repeated the story the briefers had told him. Local Director of Immigration and Naturalization Service had been instructed to announce: "The pilot's name is being withheld to prevent reprisals against his family in Cuba." Actually, Zuniga's family lived in south Florida. After his interview at INS Headquarters, he was driven to a motel by an American civilian he had not met before his Brigade training. The next day he was returned to the Happy Valley training center in Nicaragua.

A special CIA mission, flown by two of the Brigade pilots, planned to land in the US, one at Miami International Airport and one at Boca Chica Naval Air Station at Key West. Each had feathered one engine, also as planned. Upon landing, the pilots claimed they were defectors from FAR and a statement released to the media confirmed their actions of bombing the airfields. Immediately after the statement was issued and photos snapped, the pilots quietly returned to Puerto Cabezas to continue their part of the mission. The story as expected lent credibility that the attacks were not US-directed. Aircraft FAR #933 and FAR #920 each had bullet holes in the fuselage to further confirm combat appearance.

Nicaragua, Friday, 14 April 1961, 0600, D minus 3

Eight B-26Bs launched from Nicaragua with fake FAR markings destined for Cuba. Each aircraft, piloted by a Brigadista, had been loaded with 3,000 pounds of bombs and underwing rockets. Eight.50 caliber machine guns and 2,800 rounds of ammunition were loaded in the nose of the aircraft. Castro's air force flew the B-26C in which clear plexiglass had been installed in the nose. To

A B-26B of the Liberation Air Force with fake insignia and the FAR serial 933, seen after landing at Miami International, on the morning of 15 April 1961. (Albert Grandolini Collection)

confuse FAR aircraft, the B-26Bs had a blue stripe painted on the fuselage, but which ultimately proved totally ineffective.

The Brigade's B-26Bs destroyed two Sea Fury fighters at La Libertad Air Base. San Antonio de los Banos Air Base and Antonio Maceo Airport were attacked which left FAR with less than half their original aircraft.

Washington, DC, Friday, 14 April 1961, D minus 3, 1500

Even with a packed schedule, Kennedy found time to stroll the White House gardens with his wife, Jacqueline and daughter, Caroline. During the afternoon, the President met Bissell who shared the cable from Jack Hawkins at Happy Valley. Robert Kennedy reported Hawkins' cable changed his opinion of the plan in favor of the invasion. The President asked Bissell how many aircraft would be in the first strike on Cuba, now less than 24 hours away. Bissell replied the plan called for 16, to which Kennedy said, "Cut it down." Bissell thought the decision sounded off-the-cuff and made without consulting JCS or the Secretary of Defense, but he agreed to reduce the number of aircraft from 16 to only eight.

By 2000, Brigade ships sailed toward Cuba shadowed by the US Navy ships and aircraft at Happy Valley would launch just hours away.

Washington, Saturday, 15 April 1961, D minus 2, 0915

Jake Engler phoned the Agency and heard from Bissell the air strikes had been definitely cancelled. Stanley Beerli rushed to the special communications center and sent the Top Secret Air Priority message to Puerto Cabezas advising mission cancellation.

En route to Cuba, Saturday, 15 April 1961, D minus 2, 1030

Roman Corona's ship, *La Playa*, part of the Brigade fleet, slowed its pace at the mouth of the Mocombo River, 30 miles east of Guantanamo. Corona hailed from Oriente, along with some 75 others including leader, Nino Diaz. Onboard the ship, a former US Marine and current CIA officer named Curley, advised other landings in addition to Oriente were on the plan. Diaz, Corona and other exile leaders told Curley they planned to go ashore and join the guerrillas to free Oriente. Nine men and leader Renato Diaz boarded their rubber raft in the sea. The raft moved silently to within 500 feet of the coast. Renato spotted two trucks and a jeep on shore. There was no quiet place to land the raft; they returned to the ship. Back onboard their ship, Renato told Curley there was no opening and they planned to try again in 24 hours. Nino Diaz declared, much to Curley's dismay they would land up the coast. The Cubans did not consider Curley's advice helpful, and they confined him to his cabin. Four miles from shore, Corona spotted four US destroyers and more Navy vessels as the Brigadistas neared Guantanamo.

New York City, Saturday, 15 April 1961, D minus 2, 1030

Adlai Stevenson traveled from his residence in New York City to the UN General Assembly building. The first item on the agenda announced the Soviet Union's successful space flight of Yuri Gagarin. Stevenson should have known of the bombs dropped on Cuba; however, he knew nothing despite his briefing by Tracy Barnes and Arthur Schlesinger. Following the announcement, Cuban Foreign Minister, Dr. Raul Roa, jumped up and demanded the floor. He declared dramatically, "I should like to inform this assembly which is the supreme forum for the expression of the international conscience, that this morning at 0630, US aircraft flew over the island of Cuba and launched an attack without any provocation."

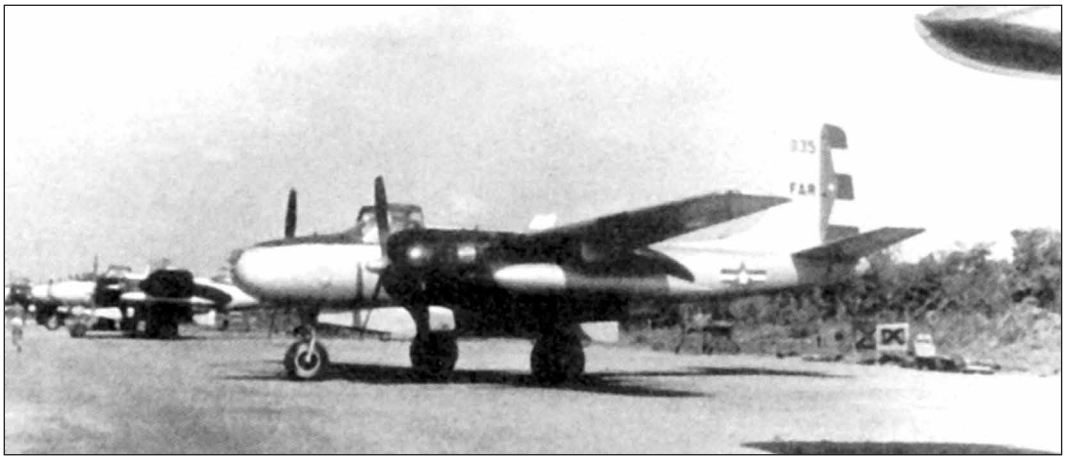
Frederick Boland, the UN President of the General Assembly, immediately banged his gavel to halt Roa. He scheduled a meeting for the following Monday, 17 April, to address Cuba's accusations of US aggression. Roa withdrew and returned to his seat. Soviet Ambassador Valentin Zorin demanded the Assembly "Discuss immediately the question of aggression against Cuba." Boland explained the rules of the assembly did not permit that to which Zorin insisted an emergency meeting be called to discuss the critical issue.

US Ambassador Adlai Stevenson was caught off guard. His staff scrambled to assemble facts for his response later in the day. Callers to the Agency received assurances, "The bombings had been the work of defectors from Cuban Air Force. The pilots landed in Miami, Florida, to seek asylum from Castro's tyranny, and the US will consider their request." Moments later Ambassador Stevenson displayed a photo of Mario Zuniga with clearly visible Cuban Air Force markings.

Photos of Zuniga's aircraft did not fool the Cuban representatives at the UN. The Cuban Air Force B-26Cs had a plexiglass nose and rockets under each wing. The photo of the aircraft being passed off as one of Castro's had rockets under the nose which was not plexiglass.

Stevenson's political representative, Dick Pederson, received a call from a colleague at the State Department who explained: "It would not be worthwhile to pursue that line of inquiry any longer."

Table 1: B-26-Flights of the Liberation Air Force, 15 April 1961			
Flight	**Codename**	**Crew**	**Target & Notes**
Puma	Puma 1	José Crespo (pilot), Lorenzo-Pérez-Lorenzo (navigator)	Ciudad Libertad, Havana
	Puma 2	Daniel Fernández-Mon (pilot), Gastón Perez (navigator)	starboard engine hit by ground fire, diverted to NAS Boca Chica, USA
	Puma 3	Osvaldo Piedra (pilot), José Fernández (navigator)	shot down into the sea in front of the Comodoro Hotel
Linda	Linda 1	Luis Cosme (pilot), Nildo Batista (navigator)	San Antonio de los Baños AB
	Linda 2	René García (pilot), Luis Ardois (navigator)	
	Linda 3	Alfredo Caballero (pilot), Alfredo Maza (navigator)	
Gorilla	Gorilla 1	Gustavo Ponzoa (pilot), Rafael García Pujol (navigator)	Antonio Maceo International Airport (Santiago de Cuba)
	Gorilla 2	Gonzalo Herrera (pilot), Angel López (navigator)	



A row of Liberation Air Force B-26Bs at Puerto Cabezas airport, seen already wearing the fake FAR insignia, and equipped with drop tanks for the long trip into the combat zone. (Albert Grandolini Collection)

Notable in this photograph of one of the CIA-owned B-26s operated by the exile Cubans are drop tanks and underwing launch rails loaded with four 127mm unguided rockets. (Albert Grandolini Collection)

The State representative realized his chief and their associates had lied to the world. State did not know yet Stevenson's presentation on the previous day had damaged his credibility, but which had been the work of Bissell and the Cuba Task Force.

In a Top Secret message to Dean Rusk at the State Department, Stevenson explained his considerable anger that he was not warned before he stood in the UN General Assembly to defend the US. Stevenson ended his message: "There is gravest risk of another U-2 disaster in such uncoordinated action," a reference to the 1 May 1960 shoot down of a U-2 over the Soviet Union.

Washington, DC, Saturday, 15 April 1961, 1200

McGeorge Bundy met with Kennedy for the daily intelligence briefing. Little information had come from the Agency about the Cuba operation. Approximately six hours after the Brigade's air strikes, Kennedy and his advisers met with Bissell for an update. Reports from returning Brigade pilots had been optimistic, but reconnaissance was not yet available.

Middleburg, Virginia, Saturday, 15 April 1961, 1300

Kennedy spent the weekend with his family at a rented house outside Washington. He joined friends watching steeplechase races at Middleburg Racetrack but had little interest. With the Cuba operation heavy on his mind, he returned to the house to work. The President suffered symptoms of Addison's Disease which, in additional to abdominal pain and fatigue, back pain had been constant since his service in the US Navy. A number of medications became part of his daily routine. Historians theorized the President's discomfort at that time may have distracted him during times of stress such as the Bay of Pigs operation.

New York City, Saturday, 15 April 1961, 1500

Stevenson returned for the UN afternoon session of the Political Committee while his staff gathered details of the strikes in Cuba. Harlan Cleveland, Assistant Secretary of State for International Affairs, and Stevenson's liaison, learned from the Agency the planes

had landed in Florida with the defectors. Cleveland prepared a speech for Stevenson to deliver at the afternoon program.

At this point in history, it is impossible to determine who misled whom that afternoon. Cleveland genuinely believed the defectors were from Castro's air force. Dean Rusk approved the speech prepared for Stevenson, and he, too, said he did not know the defectors to be fake. Despite Rusk's denial, he had attended a meeting with the President in the Oval Office. It is incredulous that someone at the meeting had not mentioned a B-26B flown by Brigade pilots landed in Florida. Stevenson prepared to defend a blatant lie at the Political Committee. In his defense, he had not been told the truth by anyone who briefed him from State Department or CIA. The ambassador delivered the speech prepared for him with dignity and commitment. The information heard by the Cuban Foreign Minister was blatantly false.

David Phillips, CIA Director of Propaganda, watched Adlai Stevenson on television speaking with assurance. Phillips asked another Agency staffer, Dick Drain, "Is it possible Stevenson had not been briefed?" The two Agency men knew Tracy Barnes went to New York to brief Stevenson, but they agreed Barnes may have given the ambassador "the flavor but not the facts."

En route to Cuba via the Caribbean, Saturday, 15 April 1961, 1600

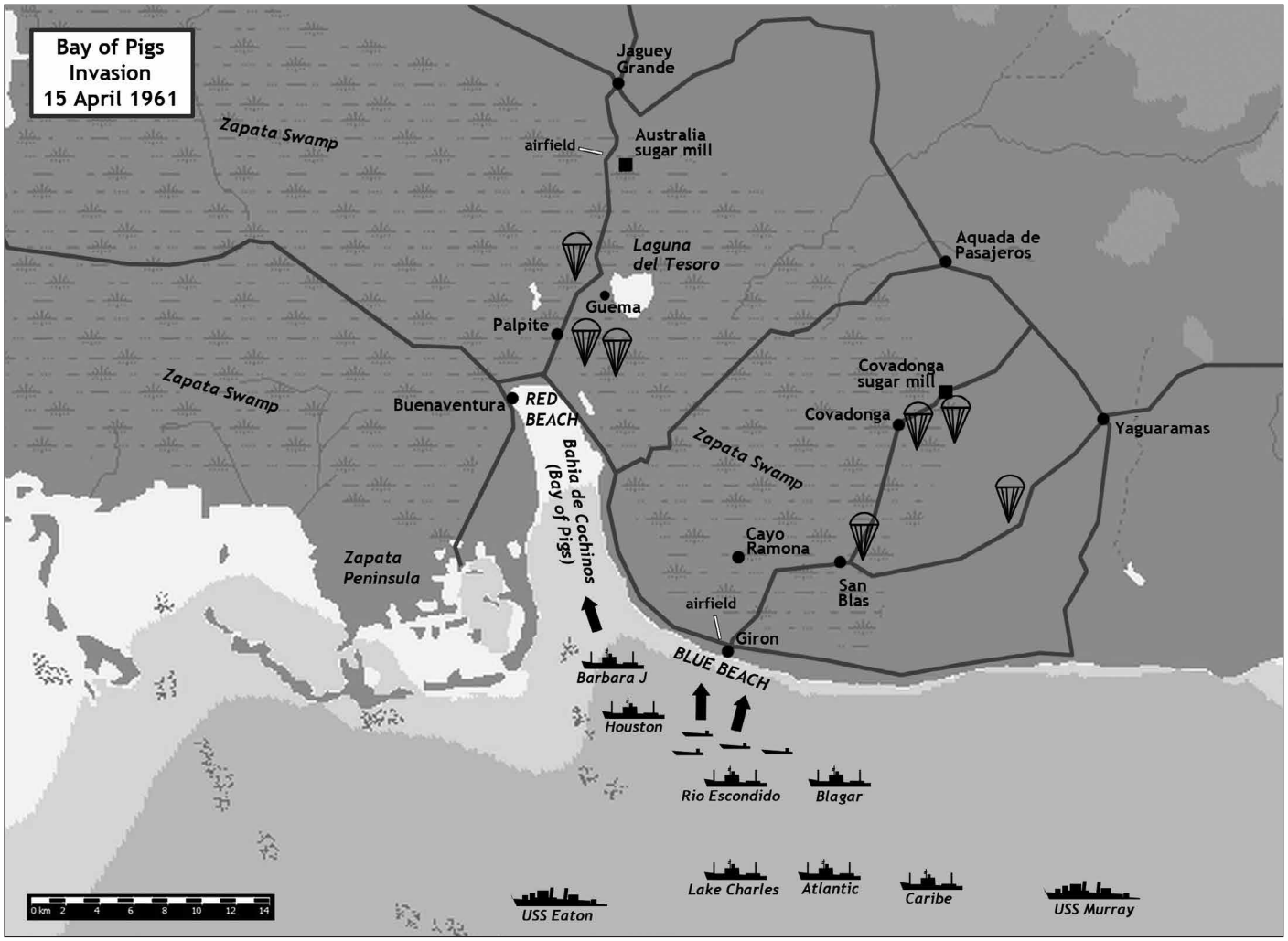
The ships of the Cuban Expeditionary Force sailed from Puerto Cabezas on different courses to the same destination. The *Houston, Rio Escondido, Caribe* and *Atlantico,* commercial freighters chartered from Garcia Line, carried most of the Brigade men. Two other ships, the *Blagar* and *Barbara J.,* converted LCIs of Second World War vintage, had been purchased by the Agency for $240,000 each. The commanders and CIA operatives of the project issued orders from these ships.

CIA Case Officer, Gray Lynch, onboard the *Blagar,* learned from incoming cables that follow-up strikes had been cancelled. He suddenly felt the operation headed in a different direction. His own military experiences in Special Forces reminded him of the Golden Rule of amphibious landings: "To control the beach, first you must control the air." Until April 1961, the US had not lost a war and had never deserted a friend.

Fourteen hundred men of the Brigade played cards, talked and slept to pass time as they waited for the potential firestorm. All were forbidden to smoke onboard the ships. They were nervous but cheered loudly when they caught a brief glimpse of a US Navy ship. Each of the US destroyers had been assigned as escort to one of the Brigade ships. The Brigade men had assumed incorrectly the US Navy ships would be there for assistance should they need it.

Bay of Pigs, Sunday, 16 April 1961, D minus 1, 0030

At Blanca's Bar on Blue Beach, Felix Rivera cooked lobster and fish for customers who came for a beer or rum. He slept in the windowless little room upstairs without charge. Rivera heard shouting outside his building, "Everybody come outside." Felix dressed in his cook's uniform and slowly opened his door. He came



The first phase of the invasion by Brigade 2506, including parachute jumps and the approach of the amphibious force, supported by two destroyers of the US Navy. (Map by Tom Cooper)

face to face with soldiers who asked him to join them to fight for freedom, but he had never even fired a gun. He shook his head, closed the door and returned inside his room.

At Red Beach, the guard at the fishing village, Victor Caballero, carried a rifle and wore a red armband. In the nearby Coast Guard launch, a friend of Victor asked about a noise he heard "like lumber being unloaded." Soon rounds from automatic weapons whizzed overhead. Caballero joined the leader of the group who called them all into a small hut to hear a broadcast on the radio. "You are being liberated from Communism and Castro is a prisoner." No one took the message seriously and they all went about their business as usual.

Fidel with members of the Women's Squadron. (Albert Grandolini Collection)

At 0230 Brigade B-26Bs took off from Puerto Cabezas and arrived over Cuba at dawn. The plan was to destroy Castro's aircraft on the ground, but the planners aborted the mission due to low cloud cover in the area. San Roman's troops came under heavy fire about 0400. He directed his men to block roads from the east, north and northwest from Playa Larga.

A member of Mariana Grajales Women's Platoon of the 26 July Movement. (Albert Grandolini Collection)

Washington, DC, Sunday, 16 April 1961, D minus 1, 0200

Generals Wheeler and Gray drove to Chairman JCS General Lemnitzer's house. He asked the visitors when he opened the door, "How did things go?" In unison, Wheeler and Gray said, "They cancelled the air strike." Lemnitzer called the JCS Situation Room to confirm. Wheeler and Gray told Lemnitzer they had come on behalf of the Agency to request naval air cover of the beach. Lemnitzer told the generals his approval depended on the State Department's response.

Charles Cabell went to Rusk's apartment. Rusk called the President but gave the phone to Cabell to make his case for US Navy jet cover. There was no time for the Brigade to fly planes from Nicaragua. The President responded to Cabell by asking to speak to Rusk; the conversation was short. Rusk reported all air strikes again denied.

Howard Hunt called Lem Jones, head of public relations, dictated a bulletin to be issued in the name of the Cuban Revolutionary Council. Ernesto Aragon and Antonio Silio, Secretary of the Revolutionary Council, met Jones at the Statler Hilton. Jones instructed the men to translate the bulletin which would be released to wire and print services. The document was not signed by Miro Cardona because he and the other members of the Council left the Hotel Lexington in New York at 1530 escorted by Will Carr. Silio initialed the document and Jones departed as quickly as he came.

Weather conditions in New York made it impossible for a plane to depart. Carr and the CRC were then driven to Philadelphia where they boarded a small private plane. The Cubans had not been told of the status of the invasion and were surprised when they landed at 0200 at a deserted airfield in Opa Locka, Florida. The group followed Bender to a nearby barracks where they met Dr. Antonio Maceo, Jose Miro Cardona and Tony Varona. They listened to a portable radio Maceo found. Each of the CRC men had sons in the Brigade, and they were anxious for news.

Khrushchev heard of the invasion on the radio in his office. He believed the Americans could not fathom an existence with Cuba so near, only 90 miles. Regardless of whose flag the invaders held, he insisted, "The Americans are involved." Khrushchev dispatched a message to Washington charging, "The US had armed and trained the invaders," and that he would give Castro all the assistance he needed.

Hawker Sea Furies seen on delivery to Cuba. Seventeen were ordered and 12 arrived in time to see some action during the final days of Batista's rule, but they were to see much more action against the Brigade – and then with considerable success. (Albert Grandolini Collection)

As Ponzoa banked toward his target at Antonio Maceo Airport, he observed a Cubana Airlines DC-3 refueling for a 0600 flight, a mission he had flown many times. He opened the bomb bay and released his explosives; within seconds he observed the fireball as the DC-3 exploded. The troops on the ground responded with tracer bullets. Herrera sprayed machine gun rounds in return and flew out to sea. On the ground more planes burst into flames. Brigade Gorilla Flight headed out to sea en route to Happy Valley.

Sunday, 16 April 1961, D minus 1, 0630

A FAR Sea Fury dropped a direct hit on the Garcia ship, the *Houston.* A fire broke out below deck and fire hoses rendered useless after being riddled with bullets. Captain Luis Morse launched one of his remaining lifeboats, but the disorganized crew seemed paralyzed. Some of the crew even jumped overboard and many drowned. When Rip and the frogmen arrived in a raft to help, he yelled at the crew, "Get off your butts, you bastards. This is your fucking war."

Another Sea Fury targeted the nearby *Rio Escondido.* Captain Tirado of the *Rio Escondido* had little time to react about his volatile cargo and the Brigade's communications van. His ship carried 200 barrels of aviation fuel that caught fire in a devastating conflagration. Tirado raced to his radio room and called Gray aboard the *Blagar.* The captain reported to Gray he had given the crew the order to "abandon ship." At Blue Beach Rip yelled into his radio to Gray, "What was that?" Gray casually responded, "The *Rio Escondido* just blew up after losing a battle with a Sea Fury." Garcia's ship crews battled the air attacks, and then had no time to unload supplies.

Gray radioed Pepe San Roman on shore, "The *Blagar* has to go."

Pepe responded pleadingly, "Don't desert us."

Gray said, "We are not deserting you." He could not bring himself to tell Pepe they could not "talk of Navy cover on an open channel."

Gus Ponzoa spotted the hills of Sierra Maestra from his aircraft. He would be the first of the Brigade pilots to arrive over Cuba. As a former Cubana Airlines pilot, he possessed the focused demeanor of a born fighter pilot. At the time Ponzoa flew from Nicaragua, Nino Diaz led a group of 160 Brigadistas in a diversionary landing 30 miles from Guantanamo. However, the mission was aborted just before landing.

Ponzoa spotted a Cuban patrol boat approximately 20 miles from the nearest coast. To avoid being identified as an enemy plane, he decreased altitude to 200 feet and skimmed over the sea. Herrera flew behind Ponzoa as they attempted a surprise on the first pass. If they survived to make a fourth pass, Castro's pilots would then be airborne and Ponzoa and Herrera in trouble. The pilots made a steep climb to 6,000 feet, Ponzoa to the northeast and Herrera to the east.

Brigade's Puma Flight flew in over land and released bombs and tracer bullets at Libertad, a suburb of Havana. Residents startled from sleep huddled in their homes. The spectacle, even observed by Fidel at his command post, prompted him to ask an aide, "What are these planes?" Then he answered his own question, "We are being bombed."

Puma Flight came under heavy fire and pilot Daniel Fernández-Mon and navigator Gastón Perez were the first casualties when their plane burst into flames and plunged into the sea.

A miscellany of civilian airliners seen at Havana Airport in early 1961. (Albert Grandolini Collection)

Smoldering wreckage of civilian DC-3 registration CU-102 seen in front of the main terminal and tower of Antoni Maceo International Airport, near Santiago de Cuba, after the first strike by Liberation Air Force B-26Bs on 15 April 1961. (Albert Grandolini Collection)

Puerto Cabezas, Nicaragua, Sunday, 16 April 1961, 0930

Both Cubans and Americans at Happy Valley awaited the return of the Brigade planes. At 0930 the group spotted incoming flights. The first two that returned, Ponzoa and Herrera, landed and were followed by two more. All crews debriefed at the Air Command building by Gar Thorsrud. The pilots reported what they believed to be the number of destroyed aircraft at each of the three sites. The results were then transmitted to Washington where weary CIA staffers celebrated the good news.

Red Beach, Sunday, 16 April 1961

Lynch decided on the spot the Red Beach landing site had to be changed, and he would go ashore with the troops. He joined the Brigadistas in the raft bound for the beach. Suddenly and unexpectedly, one of the marker lights in the raft began blinking with the switch in "off" position. The light short circuited and one of the men quickly covered it. A coral reef ran parallel to the beach forcing the frogmen to jump into waist-deep water. As they waded to the beach, they heard a jeep rumbling in their direction. The jeep stopped and aimed the headlights directly on them.

Lynch and the frogmen opened fire with automatic weapons. There was no return fire, and the lights of the vehicle went out. Lights onshore went out, but a truck roared toward the beach where intense gunfire broke out between the troops coming ashore and the occupants of the truck. Frogmen at Red Beach placed marker lights as they had fire from Fidel's militia. The ship returned fire which killed one of the frogmen caught in the crossfire. Commander of the Red Beach force, Erneido Oliva, landed with his staff in one of the first waves. The small boats and unreliable outboard motors caused them to become swamped by the heavy seas. All 185 men of the 2nd Battalion arrived ashore at Playa Larga by 0530. Oliva ordered seizure of the nearby radio station which they discovered had sounded the alarm.

Bending to political pressure, President Kennedy was hesitant to launch additional air strikes until the Brigadistas controlled the airfield at Giron. The remainder of the FAR was then available to fire on the Brigadistas at the beaches where they had landed. The element of air superiority was removed and soon turned the tide of the battle.

Excitement filled the camp of the Brigade at Happy Valley when their pilots returned after the air strikes. The next day their spirits crumbled. Follow up strikes planned for 16 April had been scrubbed. Only the strike on 17 April remained to destroy the FAR.

US Navy destroyers surrounded the aircraft carrier *Essex,* and captains of each ship boarded helicopters to meet on the carrier where a large map of Cuba was displayed in the admiral's office. Captain Dunham of the USS *Cony*, a Fletcher-class destroyer, was assigned to escort a Garcia vessel, the *Caribe.* The *Cony* contacted the *Caribe* with the International Code of Signals.[1] For the *Caribe,* the skipper welcomed the confirmation the Americans had his back.

Lieutenant Commander Edmund J. Maddock, the *Essex* Air Operations Officer did not know his vessel's destination. He tracked the course personally with a dead reckoning tracer, and suddenly discovered he was outside the Bay of Pigs. Fighter pilots of the *Blue Blasters* squadron on the *Essex* went on alert when their commander Mike Griffin told them they would be flying without dog tags and identification.

USS *Eaton,* Captain Peter Perkins, ordered all flags and the ship's name to be removed on the stern. Although he had no idea where he was headed, he assumed it could have something to do with the injured Brigade men from the *Atlantico.* Perkins surveyed his ship for any sailors who could speak Spanish. He talked to the Garcia fleet on the CB radios they had been given in Norfolk. The *Eaton* led the fleet to the beach, and the USS *Murray* covered the end of the column. Perkins was ordered to stay around the Cayo Largo lighthouse. He had by now figured the Brigade vessels were staging landings. For six days, Perkins did not sleep except for naps in his chair waiting and watching at the bridge.

Washington, DC, Sunday, 16 April 1961, D minus 1, 1100

As Kennedy returned from church service on Sunday morning, Fidel Castro had finished a two-hour funeral speech for seven victims of the bombing the previous Saturday. Castro thought more strikes would be coming, but surprisingly there were none. As a message to Cuban citizens who considered joining the rebellion with the Brigade, he had filled prisons and sports arenas with those he considered spies or traitors. Castro even demanded Kennedy present to the UN the defectors who flew from Cuba to Miami.

Washington, DC, Sunday, 16 April 1961, D minus 1, 1700

Charles Cabell spent the day golfing with friends but stopped at Agency headquarters for an appearance in Allen Dulles' absence on official travel outside the country. Cabell walked directly into the "war room" and met with Colonel Stanley Beerli, Director of Air Operations. They reviewed the recent U-2 photographs and Beerli reported the next morning's strikes being readied.

Cabell's question to those in the room, "Do we have approval for the mission?" hung in the air of silence. Beerli answered affirmative. Cabell wanted to confirm the approval and called Dean Rusk, Secretary of State. Staffers at the Agency that day thought Cabell only came to the office that day to stir the pot and contribute absolutely nothing. And stir the pot he did.

Brigade men onboard the ships slept little on decks while the sunrise promised another blazing hot day. Food supplies had become low with only crackers, biscuits and cold sausages. Onboard the *Atlantico* conditions were also dire. Many felt overwhelmed, sailing to Cuba where they expected to meet Castro's army of 30,000. Even with these odds, they believed the US destroyers in the distance served as backup. Cuban broadcasts came over the radios and the men wondered why they had not heard anything of additional air strikes.

The day dawned in Cuba with perfect conditions for a U-2 reconnaissance flight. The first post-strike U-2 photographs sat on the table for examination by the CIA National Photographic Interpretation Center. The Center occupied the top four floors of a non-descript building in downtown Washington, DC. Ground floor tenants leased space for an automobile showroom.

U-2 photographs taken the previous morning revealed disappointing results. The destruction reported by the pilots had not been as severe as described. Only five of Castro's aircraft had been completely destroyed. Castro had gathered these surviving aircraft at San Antonio de los Banos making them an easy target.

Secretary Rusk understood the second strike planned to coincide with landings to appear they originated from the airstrip near the beach. He called the President and pointed out the second strike would look as if it came from Nicaragua. Kennedy feared the US involvement in a war with the Soviet Union especially so early in his administration. The President ordered the cancellation of the strike. When Bissell and Cabell arrived at the State Department to meet with Rusk, they learned the President ordered the Monday strike also cancelled. Bissell strongly argued the success of the mission was threatened, and it would be too late to call it off.

Rusk then agreed to call the President again laying out Bissell's argument for proceeding with the airstrikes. However, the President stood firm with his earlier decision. Cabell expressed his own opinion, "What military man dared to argue with the Commander in Chief?"

The communications officer at Puerto Cabezas delivered an important message to Agency leader Gar Thorsrud. The message began: "Cancel, Cancel, Cancel." Gar checked the message from Washington against the operations order and confirmed the cancellation of the strikes. When they learned of the cancellations, pilots Gus Ponzoa, Gonzalo Herrera and René García discussed taking over the base and flying the mission on their own. However, the pilots realized they could not do it without Americans support.

In Washington, DC, Jake Engler's reaction to the order of cancellation had been that of surprise and disbelief. He, Beerli, Phillips, Hunt and a few others paced around Cabell's office. They argued and cursed, while General Cabell remained calm. With nothing left for them to do, the men finally gave up and left the office.

Nearing the Coast of Cuba, Sunday, 16 April 1961, D minus 1, 1800

The Brigade fleet met 40 miles south of the coast of Cuba. Together the ships followed the *Blagar.* The leaders reviewed the operation and discussed possible obstacles. Pepe San Roman and Manuel Artime led the Brigade men in a moving ceremony on the deck and reminded them of the great historical and courageous campaign they had begun. They raised the Cuban flag with a salute and sang the Cuban national anthem. At the end, everyone prayed for a safe landing and the recovery of their homeland. The men then checked their packs and wiped down the M1 Garand semiautomatic rifles or .45 caliber pistols.

Washington, DC, Sunday, 16 April 1961, D minus 1, 2000

Jack Hawkins took advantage of a quiet evening and took his wife out to dinner. By the time he returned to Agency headquarters, the operation had become a catastrophe.

Cabell's question earlier in the day regarding approval for the mission had popped the lid on the can of worms. He called Secretary Rusk who reviewed the plan for the air strikes then called the President. They discussed the strikes and concerns for the operation. Rusk expressed surprise about additional air strikes. The President stated emphatically, "I'm not signed on to this."

The President's shock that he had not already agreed to the 17 April strikes indicated a total lack of effective communication. It could mean a failure by the President and Rusk to fully understand the mission. Bissell could have failed to emphasize the strikes in his briefing on 12 April. From the CIA planners' perspective, there had never been any doubt that the air strikes would be critical to demolish Castro's airplanes on the ground. It appeared that everyone at CIA took this for granted, but apparently President Kennedy, Dean Rusk and McGeorge Bundy had not. On Sunday, just a few hours before the Brigade's landings at the Bay of Pigs, the President told Rusk to halt the air strikes.

Onboard the Garcia Ships, Sunday, 16 April 1961, D minus 1, 2300

Eduardo Garcia stood on the bridge of his ship *Caribe* filled with satisfaction. Aboard five of the Garcia vessels, 1,453 members of the Brigade had been thoroughly briefed on the forthcoming operation. Agent Gray Lynch, filled with dread, stood on the bridge of the Agency lead ship, the *Blagar.* The LSD USS *San Marcos* moved up in the column and prepared to unload landing craft vehicles and personnel with tanks, trucks and equipment. Garcia's *Lake Charles* carried 15 days of supplies for the Brigade.

A Landing Craft Mechanized (LCM) with US Navy crew headed toward the *Caribe* and boarded Silvio Perez and 43 other Brigadistas. They transferred mostly in silence. Perez, content to be in charge of his own fleet again, boarded LCU No. 3, moving toward Blue Beach at Giron and Red Beach at Playa Larga.

On the evening of 16 April, the freighters met with the LSD USS *San Marcos.* Exactly 30 miles offshore, the *San Marcos* offloaded LCUs and LCVPs with trucks, jeeps and tanks. The Brigade was then declared operational. The invasion craft arrived at the mouth of the Bay of Pigs, and broke into their assigned groups, the main team at Giron.

Frogmen onboard the *Barbara J.,* directed by Agency leader, Rip, stood ready for the beginning of their mission. The support unit landed at Playa Larga, nicknamed Red Beach, five miles further up the inlet. En route to Red Beach, the team practice-fired their

weapons. They painted their faces black and declared they were ready. Sounds like fireworks suddenly lit up Blue Beach and Giron. Rip announced loudly, "The invasion is on."

CIA ship *Blagar,* with Gray and Alonso leading their frogmen team, headed for Blue Beach. Alonso thought how relieved he felt to have Gray's experience. They boarded an 18-foot catamaran powered by two 70-horsepower outboard motors with a rubber raft in tow. To their surprise, Gray decided to accompany them to the beach and observe their safe arrival. He strapped on an ammunition belt, grabbed his Browning Automatic Rifle (BAR) and joined his team. Agency Intelligence told them to land on the extreme right where a rock jetty cropped out into the water and a small cantina on the beach gave initial cover. The plan indicated the area would likely be quiet; locals would be asleep when the team landed. Suddenly the two men expressed total shock simultaneously; dead ahead on the beach, Fidel's men had installed bright vapor lights that lit up the area like New York City on New Year's Eve.

Gray and Alonso took their inflatable raft and headed for the center of the beach. Approximately eight yards offshore, the raft hit bottom and the engine died. They had hit the coral reefs the Agency interpreted as "seaweed" and had dismissed further analysis. Closer to shore, they heard a vehicle approaching. The vehicle then turned and shined its lights directly at the raft and its crew. Gray and Alonso fired into the vehicle until its lights went out.

Gray instructed the *Blagar* to demolish the cantina on the beach, then he heard the vessel roaring in his direction. Unfortunately, Gray neglected to advise the ship of the coral reef directly in front of them. When Gray returned to the *Blagar*, he received a message from Washington: "Castro still has operational aircraft. Expect you to be hit at dawn. Unload troops and supplies and return the ships out to sea quickly." Had Gray known of the strike cancellation, he might have responded with more alarm.

Hugo Sueiro Rios, Commander of the Brigade 2nd Battalion, briefed his men not to worry because "no communications existed within 20 miles of the beach." Sueiro believed, as most Brigade men did, if anything went wrong, they would be rescued by the Americans.

Brigade leaders, Pepe San Roman and Manuel Artime, started the Blue Beach landing and took the lead landing craft. They arrived on the beach ready to take command. Trouble began when small boats headed for the beach struck the coral reefs at full speed. Before other ships could be notified, many sank and others sustained significant damage. The advantage of surprise had been lost.

Once Giron was secured, unloading equipment and supplies began. Pepe San Roman established his headquarters with two two-and-a-half ton trucks and two rifle squads. He consolidated the Brigade troops, equipment and supplies at Blue Beach.

Havana, Monday, 17 April 1961, D Day, 0115

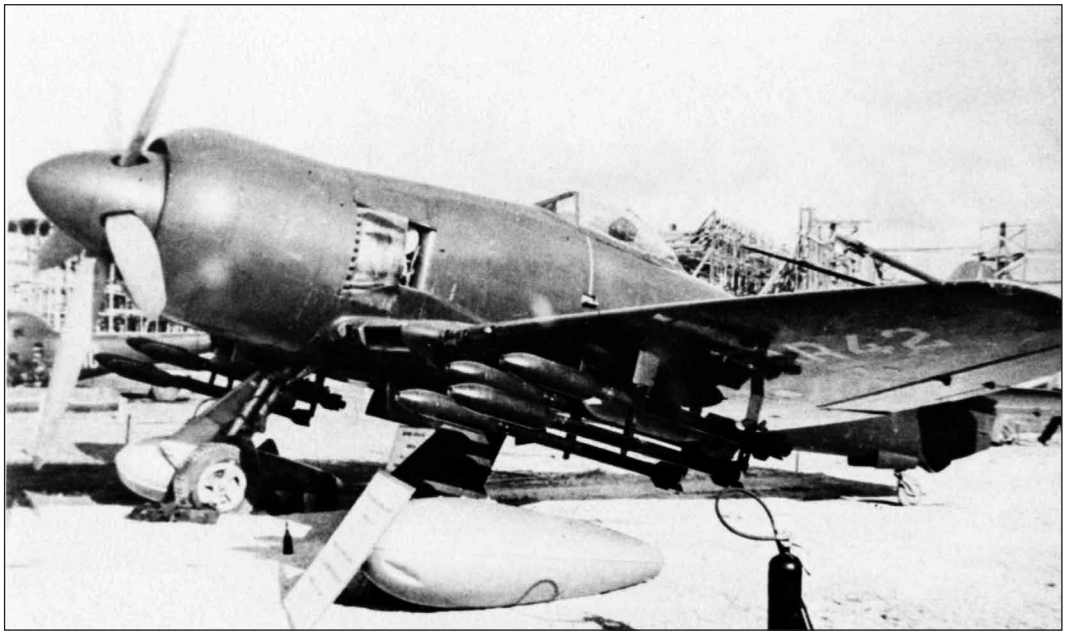
Fidel slept in his apartment at his Point One Headquarters when he received a phone call that advised him of the landings at Giron. He raced to the front to lead his men into the battle. It was suspected that he learned from Soviet spies in the US about the planned attack on Cuba. Surely, he could have even read *The New York Times* or listened to US radio broadcasts. He alerted his militia stationed at the Central Australia Sugar Mill. Fidel's intelligence reported Brigadistas en route, but it was unknown if they would make several small landings or a massive assault from the sea. Depending on the type of assault, Castro determined the best option would avoid splitting his troops and to station them in a single location to defeat the invaders. The landing of the exile provisional government, which he assumed to be part of assault, had to be stopped. Castro departed Havana en route to the Bay of Pigs after issuing orders as he jumped in his jeep.

Varadero, Cuba, Monday, 17 April 1961, D Day, 0300

Another breakdown in communication resulted when the Agency failed to alert the anti-Castro underground in Cuba, and the Brigade infiltrators who had arrived earlier on the island. No one notified them of the location and date of the attack. That critical information combined with Castro's roundup and detention of suspected enemies all over the island resulted in chaos.

Agency infiltrator Jorge Recarey was awakened by the old man who lived at the house where he was staying. What he heard on the radio excited him. The man drove him in a 1959 Buick to join the newly trained guerrillas. Jorge's sugar farming book had been carved out on the inside to hold a.22 caliber pistol he bought before he left Miami.

At the intersection of the road from Mantanzas, a group of soldiers headed toward Giron and the Bay of Pigs. Jorge and his driver encountered a large military convoy traveling at top speed. Castro's militia filled the trucks yelling, "Viva la revolucion!" Jorge could do nothing but watch sadly from inside the stopped car as they waited for the trucks to pass. The Agency infiltrator felt the operation was in trouble when he saw Castro's militia crossing the exact bridge he was supposed to blow up. He started thinking of



Sea Fury FAR542 of the FAR, seen armed with a total of eight 127mm unguided rockets, after the fighting in the Bay of Pigs. Notably, the entire aircraft was painted in 'Cuban Olive Green'. The two 'silver bags' on the ground were drop tanks. (Albert Grandolini Collection)

ways to get out of this jam Colonel Hawkins and the CIA had made for him and the other infiltrators.

Managua, Cuba, Monday, 17 April 1961, D Day, 0330

Ramon Fernandez, Commander of the Officer Cadet School in Managua, learned from Fidel of the landings at the Zapata Swamp. Fernandez, ordered to go immediately to Havana, 65 miles away, took his own Toyota truck to lead the student battalion to the beaches. By 0355, Fernandez and five other men crowded into the truck and sped to Havana.

San Antonio de los Banos, Monday, 17 April 1961, D Day, 0400

Captain Enrique Carreras sat strapped in his FAR Sea Fury #541 at 0400 and waited his turn on the runway for takeoff. When the operations officer drove a jeep to his waiting aircraft, Carreras learned of the beach invasion. He released all his straps in the cockpit and raced on foot to answer an awaiting phone call in the control tower from Fidel. The order from the leader was short: Sink the ships at Playa Giron. "I will comply with your orders," Carreras replied sharply.

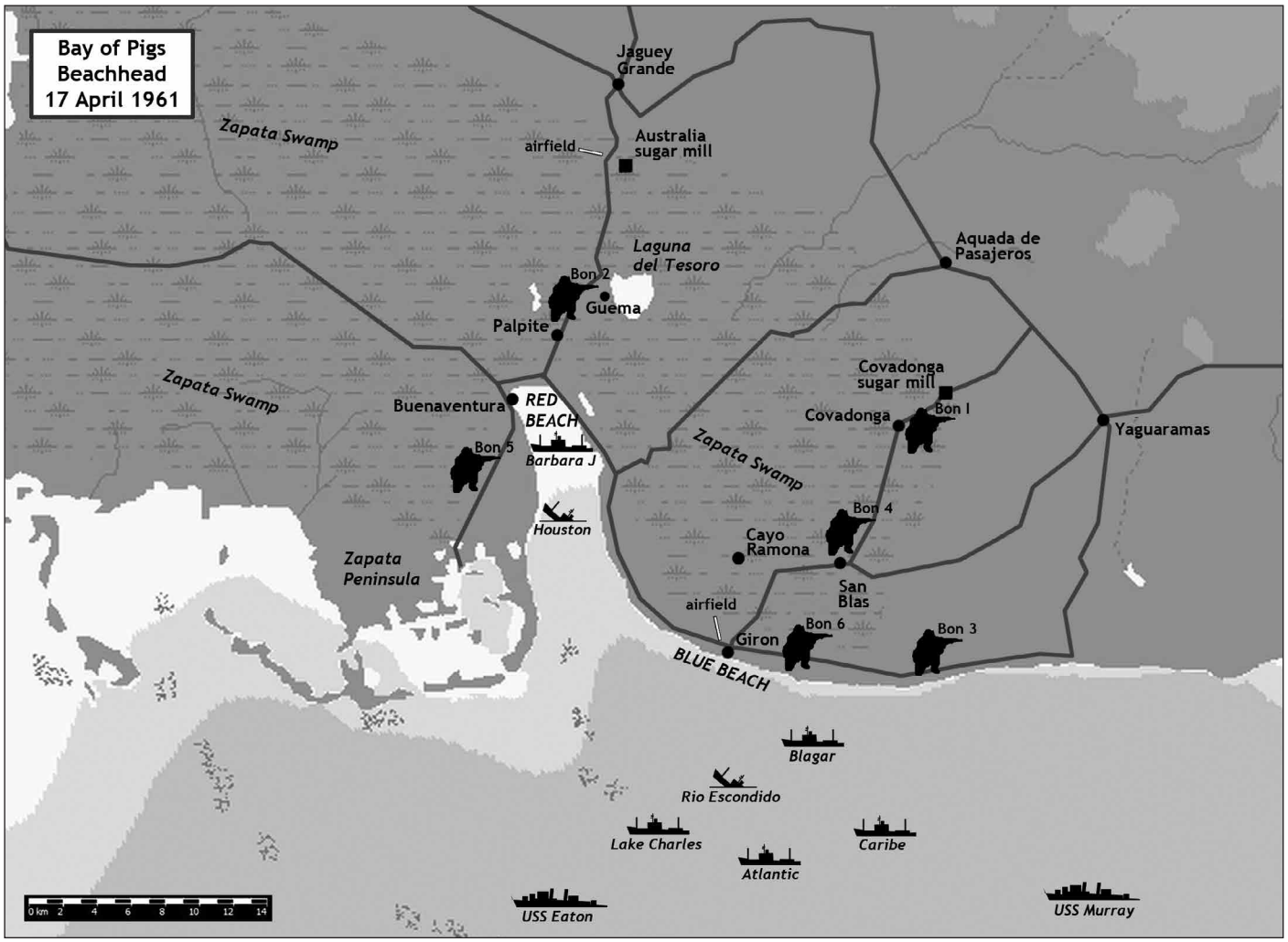
Though Carreras had no combat experience, he was the most experienced pilot of Castro's air force. He had been trained at Kelly Field in San Antonio, Texas in 1945. He received additional tactical training at Air University at Maxwell Field in Montgomery, Alabama, Lackland Air Force Base in San Antonio, Texas and Nellis Air Force Base in Las Vegas, Nevada. He became the first Latin American to fly supersonic.

Carreras' Sea Fury was slower than one of the jets, but he carried bombs on his aircraft. His wingman also flew a Sea Fury and a third pilot flew a B-26C. Most of Castro's aircraft had not been well maintained and resulted in poor preparation for flight. Rafael del Pino, a T-33 pilot, had never fired his plane's guns even in target practice. He was concerned about the mission because the automatic starter on his Sea Fury malfunctioned frequently.

The burners on del Pino's T-33 frequently became overheated and sometimes flamed out or cracked on takeoff. Mechanics commonly removed parts from a crashed aircraft to install in another plane to make it air worthy. Del Pino was scheduled for one such aircraft, #711, that had received cannibalized parts. Once airborne, he soon spotted an enemy B-26B and fired from less than 200 yards destroying his target. When a fragment of the B-26B hit del Pino's T-33, he realized he made a huge mistake; he failed to jettison his rockets before the attack. He could well have been destroyed along with the B-26B, but he survived.

Happy Valley, Nicaragua, Monday, 17 April 1961, D Day, 0430

Eight B-26B Invaders loaded with bombs and rockets took off from Nicaragua. At 8,000-feet altitude, the aircraft flew in three flight formations each headed for a different target. Captain Gustavo Ponzoa with his navigator Rafael Garcia Pujol, designated Gorilla One, led the first flight. Gonzalo Herrera piloted Gorilla Two with



The second phase of the invasion by Brigade 2506, the beachhead established by its battalions (Bon 1 – Bon 6) and the first losses to air strikes by the FAR. (Map by Tom Cooper)

his navigator Angel López. They preceded Linda Flight and Puma Flight. Gorilla One and Gorilla Two flew toward their target at Antonio Maceo Airport in Santiago de Cuba. Linda Flight targeted San Antonio de los Banos south of Havana. Puma Flight targeted a military base, Libertad, west of Havana, close to Castro's compound.

Washington, DC, Monday, 17 April 1961, 0500

U-2 reconnaissance photographs, analyzed at the National Photographic Interpretation Center in Washington, DC, confirmed the aircraft inventory at Libertad consisted of six Lockheed T-33 jet trainers with wing-mounted rockets, six Hawker Sea Furies and six Douglas B-26Cs. The original plan to wipe out Castro's aircraft as they sat on the ramps would leave Castro with no aircraft to hit the Brigade ships as they arrived at the beaches.

Enroute to Miami, Florida, Monday, 17 April 1961, D Day, 0500

Brigade B-26Bs had been painted to resemble Castro's B-26Cs, including the sequence of serial numbers. With the first B-26Bs well on their way, the next flight prepared to taxi and take off. B-26B #933 launched and passed low over Cuba but continued north to Miami as part of the Agency's planned deception.

Bay of Pigs, Cuba, Monday, 17 April 1961, D Day, 0530

The Brigade established beachheads at Red and Blue beaches. San Roman and Oliva set up their command posts and advised ships to move back out to sea before attacks began. The plan was to have them return the next evening; however, there was no time to coordinate a change of the plan.

Nearing the Bay of Pigs, Monday, 17 April 1961, D Day, 0600

Captain Eddie Ferrer and his co-pilot, Raul Soliz, flew their C-46 from Puerto Cabezas to drop 177 paratroopers northeast of the Bay of Pigs beach. They observed an aircraft carrier, the *Essex,* and two destroyers they felt certain would join the battle. Ferrer entered the cabin where the nervous, but prepared jumpers waited. He shook hands with the paratrooper commander, Alejandro del Valle. The two agreed to meet for a beer to celebrate after their victory.

Back in the cockpit, Ferrer alerted the paratroopers they were close to the drop zone at the San Blas road but he flew a short distance farther to avoid releasing them near one of Castro's jeep with three men. When Ferrer made a pass over the Giron airfield as his flight plan instructed, Soliz yelled when he saw a Castro B-26C approaching. "See it has a plastic nose." Ferrer's C-46, unarmed and slower than the enemy B-26C, fell in the crosshairs. In a suicide maneuver, Ferrer headed directly toward the B-26C. The FARC bomber pilot quickly pushed his plane's nose down to avoid a collision. Ferrer turned his aircraft toward the invasion fleet, hoping the ships would fire at the bomber which they did. Ferrer and Soliz returned to Happy Valley for well-deserved sleep, the first in 48 hours.

Havana, Monday, 17 April 1961, D Day, 0530

Agency infiltrator Edgar Sapo, stayed at an apartment on the north side of town where he kept five machine guns and hand grenades. He had fallen asleep and awakened at 0530 by others in the apartment. They shouted, "Listen to the radio. The landing has started."

Sapo quickly responded, "This is not possible." He said silently, "The Americans would never fail to let me know before the invasion."

San Pedro de Mayabon, Monday, 17 April 1961, D Day, 0600

A messenger knocked on Felix Duque's door in San Pedro de Mayabon to alert him of the landing at the swamp. Felix had retired from Castro's army and now ran a 112,000-acre vegetable farm business. He still wore the uniform, his major's insignia and his pistol, and he was exhilarated by the action. Duque had disdain for the Army when nothing happened. He grabbed his bazooka and ammunition hidden at his home since the Sierra Maestra days. Felix collected four other men and weapons from the farm, and they climbed into his packed 1959 Buick. He stopped at the village of Colon and tried to determine which way he should go. It did not occur to him to call for orders and directions. "Who needed directions?" he reasoned. He took the shortest road to Giron through Covadonga.

Bay of Pigs, Monday, 17 April 1961, D Day, 0600

Castro's forces began another push at San Blas. Brigade Commander, Pepe San Roman repositioned the 6th Battalion from Blue Beach to the road from Playa Larga. The Brigade was attacked from Castro's aircraft strafing through the beachhead.

Brigade frogmen cleared a path through the reefs for the ships. Thirty minutes later the *Blagar* moved tanks and heavy weapons ashore. A FAR B-26C broke through the clouds and along with T-33s and Sea Furies, launched an attack on the ships. The *Houston* sustained heavy damage, and the captain beached the vessel on the west shore of the Bay of Pigs, five miles from Red Beach.

Puerto Cabezas, Nicaragua, Monday, 17 April 1961, D Day, 0700

While ground crews at Puerto Cabezas checked and re-checked all parts on the returning planes, the pilots played cards, horseshoes, smoked and drank beer. They could not understand the reason for reducing the strikes. Why not maintain the pressure on Castro? The American commanders sat in the Air Command building and would not answer questions. Brigade pilots believed the commanders had assured them that the operation would not fail. The Agency fed them a steady diet of positive reinforcement, and they believed the US jets would fill the gaps. They never could imagine an all-out attack with everything they had would not be flown on Monday.

The first air attack ended at 0700 and the Brigade claimed two B-26Cs shot down. They suffered great losses too. Medical supplies were lost when the *Houston* sank and the few remaining doctors on the beaches were overwhelmed with casualties. Radio equipment, submerged in salt water and inoperable, left Roman and Oliva unable to communicate with each other.

Five C-46s and one C-54 passed over at 0730 en route to their drop zone. Tanks and support vehicles had been unloaded at Blue Beach by 0730 and all personnel arrived onshore by 0830. The 3rd Battalion secured the airstrip. Heavy equipment and paratroopers dropped north of Playa Larga. Some equipment and paratroopers missed their mark and landed in the swamps. Others landed under fire and were killed still in their parachutes.

Finally at 1000 San Roman contacted Oliva at Red Beach. San Ramon reported heavy fighting onshore, but he had heard nothing from the 1st and 5th Battalions. Oliva asked San Roman to send a tank and troops to reinforce his position. San Roman reported Castro's forces proceeding on the same road the paratroopers held. By noon San Roman knew his men were pinned down. When the ships moved back out to sea, supply lines were interrupted. With communication lines broken, runners delivered messages.

A column of Soviet-made T-34/85 tanks rolling down the streets of Havana. (Albert Grandolini Collection)

One of at least two T-34/85s knocked out by M41s of Brigade 2506. (Albert Grandolini Collection)

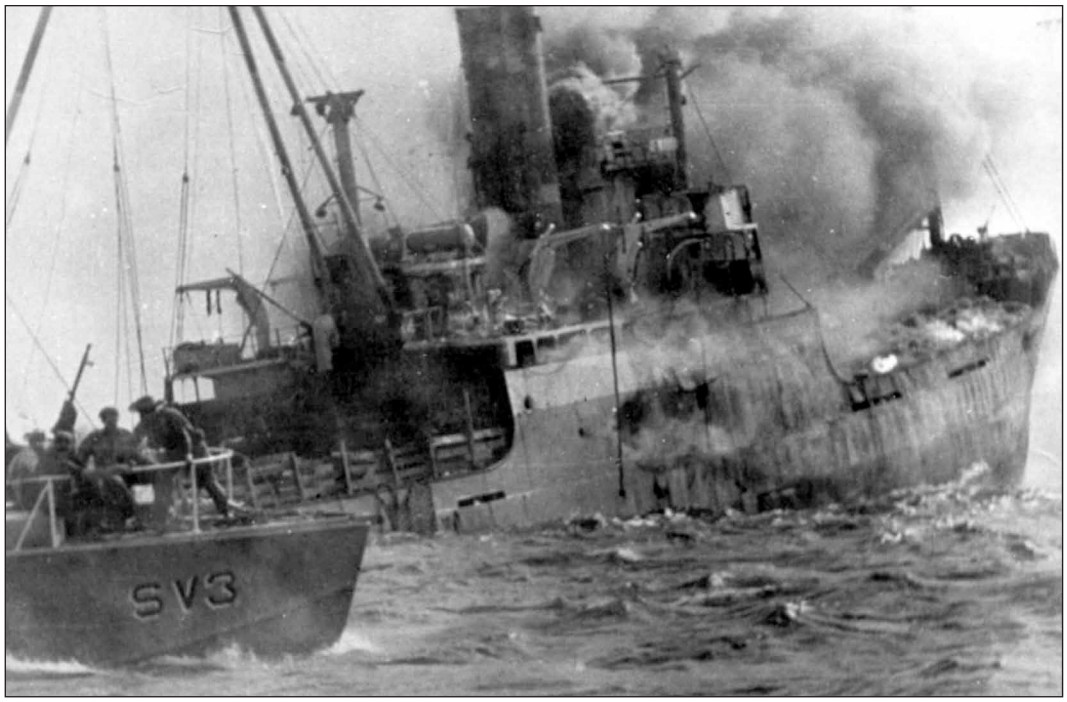
Other units of the operation landed safely and took up positions in the roads to Covadonga and Yaguaramas in Cienfuegos Province. Airborne drops had secured two roads, but the road north of Playa Larga remained open resulting in Castro's forces posing a major threat to the Brigade.

The citizens of San Blas offered assistance to the paratroopers, carrying supplies and water and helping care for the wounded. Five civilians did offer to fight with the Brigade and they were quickly provided with uniforms and weapons to become part of the unit.

San Roman ordered preparation for defense of Blue Beach. Throughout D Day heavy fighting broke out on roads leading into the area. He sent three tanks and six mortars toward Red Beach to reinforce Oliva's position. His M41 tanks had optimum positions at two crossroads. The first attack that night came from an armored column that rapidly overpowered the Brigadistas. The survivors observed the Fidelistas advancing in their direction. The paratroopers intercepted enemy transmissions that reported "four infantry battalions and two armored companies."

San Roman continued to believe the supply ships would return and he designated a group to unload the much-needed supplies. However,

A rare view of a column of IS-2M heavy tanks, 41 of which were delivered to Cuba before the Bay of Pigs invasion: they were kept in reserve during the fighting in the Bay of Pigs. (Albert Grandolini Collection)



A view at the sinking SS *Houston*. (Albert Grandolini Collection)

The hulk of SS *Houston* was eventually beached before survivors of the crew abandoned the ship. (Albert Grandolini Collection)

men mounted the remaining trucks and headed south to Giron where they expected to be resupplied.

Enroute to Giron, Monday, 17 April 1961, D Day, 0730

Roman Fernandez's truck ran ahead of the Officer Cadet Battalion which traveled in any vehicle they found. In Jovellanos a local captain found Fernandez and showed him to a phone where a call from Fidel awaited. Castro told Fernandez to establish his headquarters at the Central Australia Sugar Mill in the manager's office by 0800. The manager of the mill told Fernandez many local men wanted to fight, but there were no weapons.

Over the Bay of Pigs, Monday, 17 April 1961, D Day, 0830

Carreras lined up his Sea Fury for his second mission. The captain had instructed his students to "use your necks" to look all around, not just at the target. On this flight, Carreras almost forgot his own instruction to the cadets. He focused on the *Houston* to ensure it was sinking. At that moment, a B-26B opened fire. Carreras responded immediately and banked leaving the B-26B smoking. He targeted the *Rio Escondido* that carried the Brigade communications van. All his eight rockets hit the ship. As it exploded, he increased his altitude turning away from the target. His engine trailed flames as he landed back at the base at San Antonio de los Banos.

no landing vessels arrived. A 25-foot boat with a radio operator launched out to sea, but the crews of *Blagar* and *Barbara J.* refused to return to the beaches. The crews had not been told they would be involved in combat.

While the Brigadistas held Playa Larga, Castro's troops fired on them with 76mm and 122mm batteries. Oliva deployed bazookas closest to the road. The bombardment ceased at midnight, but T-34/85 tanks rolled through the crossroads. Oliva's M41s knocked out the first two and launched mortar fire on Castro's infantry with considerable success. Out of ammunition, Brigade tanks pulled back at 0430. Another T-34 tank rolled to the crossroads and the driver stopped. He jumped out of the tank, surrendered and said he wanted to join the Brigade. With no ammunition by 0900, Oliva's

Duque, with his vegetable farmers and the trusty bazooka, stopped on the main street of Covadonga shortly after 0900. Word on the street reported some paratroopers had landed near San Blas. He silently questioned, "Paratroopers? Are we now facing the US Army and Air Force?" Several local men surrounded him and said they wanted to defend the sugar mill, but no one agreed what to do first. Felix Duque shouldered his bazooka and strode down the San Blas road. Two enemy trucks advanced down the same road. Duque waited for the convoy to come closer before he fired the bazooka. After a short skirmish, Brigade troops withdrew, leaving trucks, machine guns, pistols, ammunition, canteens, packaged American food and parachutes. Back in Covadonga, Duque called Army

A group of guerrillas with one of the M4 Shermans captured during the Battle of Santa Clara. (Albert Grandolini Collection)

A rebel atop of a captured Staghound armored car after the Battle of Santa Clara. (Albert Grandolini Collection)

Headquarters at Santa Clara. He reported contact with the enemy, and he was instructed to mount a defense of his area. He did not ask for a status of the general situation; he had his assignment.

At 1000, Roman Fernandez reported the Managua Officer Cadet Battalion had arrived in the area, as well as the 225th Militia Battalion composed of laborers and farm hands armed with Czechoslovak Vz. 52 rifles. They had only 20 rounds for each rifle. Fidel ordered Fernandez to send the cadet battalion to take the town of Palpite, but it was difficult to even find it on the maps.

Fernandez reported to Fidel the Palpite area had already been taken. Castro shouted into the phone, "We've already won the war. Let's go take Playa Larga." However, Fidel's excitement about winning the war was premature. Brigade planes did significant damage at Playa Larga. Fidel ordered Fernandez to return to Palpite; he was taking control of headquarters at the Central Australia Sugar Mill.

At this point, Castro fell for one of the many Agency tricks carried in their arsenal. Eight boats, all towing smaller craft and crewed by Agency personnel, left Miami loaded with electronic equipment. A short distance from the Cuban coast, all the boats dispersed, but none touched land. Equipment operators then set off lights, sound effects and electronic signals to appear as if a large invasion headed for shore. The deception worked as planned and by daybreak the pseudo invasion evaporated.

Duque sat in his truck and wrote instructions for his rear command post; he and his men were four miles from Giron. A runner arrived with a message from the commanding officer of a tank unit. The message reported: "Stay where you are; do not take San Blas."

Duque exploded with a string of obscenities. "That's crazy. I've already taken San Blas." At the Bay of Pigs, troops were similarly confused.

Santiago de Cuba, Monday, 17 April 1961, D Day, 1100

The CIA's agent in Oriente Province, Jose Basulto, worked in Santiago de Cuba. As instructed, he contacted a local doctor who had buried Jose's radio and code books in his flower garden. He regularly contacted the Agency when he received dates to transmit. Underground fighters who hid in the nearby hills asked Jose to arrange for an air drop of ammunition. The fighters only received instruction on how to prepare for a drop. Finally, Jose received confirmation of "ten tons of weapons" to be dropped on 18 April. By Saturday, Jose traveled to Manganillo to assist with the incoming weapons.

Basulto received a message: "Most urgent. Large well-armed force landed in southern Las Villas Province. Blow bridges and arrange for uprising." Jose learned more from Castro's radio and earlier than from his team leaders. By now half the town had been arrested. Jose's response read, "Impossible to rise. Most patriots in jail. Thanks for your damned invitation. Closing transmission."

Washington, DC, Monday, 17 April 1961, D Day, 2100

News trickled in about the disaster in Cuba. Allen Dulles arrived at the Baltimore/Washington International Airport after a weekend promotion of the Young Presidents Organization in San Juan, Puerto Rico. Soviet news broadcast "the notorious American master spy" Allen Dulles had come to Puerto Rico to direct the action against Cuba. Dulles began his speech: "Revolutions are in progress and in the making." The speech had been prepared long before the Bay of Pigs invasion, but it would have been difficult to convince anyone.

Dick Drain was assigned to meet Dulles and brief him on the status of the operation. After the two men entered the director's

chauffeur-driven Cadillac for the trip back to Washington, Dulles asked, "What's your news?"

> "It's a fast-breaking situation," Drain reported. "It could have changed since I left to meet you, but the situation has gone downhill. Today's air strike was killed."
>
> "Why?" Dulles asked.
>
> "Stevenson raised hell with the President. My guess is this whole thing is going to hell."

Dulles' apparent disinterest in the operation shocked Drain. Instead of discussing the Cuba operation, Dulles asked Drain about the kind of man he would find the prime minister of Greece to be because the Secretary had a meeting with him later in the week.

Washington, DC, Monday, 17 April 1961, 2130

McGeorge Bundy called for General Cabell at CIA Headquarters. Bundy spoke quickly: "The President has directed that the air strikes scheduled for tomorrow be cancelled." Cabell replied this was no simple matter to countermand orders.

He called Bissell who was preparing to return to headquarters. Bundy had already talked to Bissell, and they met a short time later with Rusk at the State Department. Rusk explained to the group that "political requirements are over-riding."

He said, "The air strikes were not really that important," and he argued the ships could unload at night and be headed back out to sea by dawn. Rusk believed when the beaches were secured, the B-26Bs would fly from Nicaragua.

Jack Hawkins learned of the air strike cancellation when he returned to headquarters. He called Bissell at Rusk's office and said with no reservation the result would be disastrous with the air strikes cancelled. Hawkins explained if he had known of the cancellation earlier, the operation could have been diverted. He begged Bissell to convince the President to reverse his cancellation.

At 2300, Rusk called the President and told him Cabell and Bissell were in his office. The Secretary laid out the concerns of the Agency leaders and added his own opinion. Obviously, the President's answer was short. Rusk asked if either of the men wished to talk to the President. Both replied there was no point; the Commander in Chief had spoken.

Southern Coast of Cuba, Monday, 17 April 1961, 2300

The USS *San Marcos,* a Landing Ship Dock (LSD), arrived from Vieques, Puerto Rico. After several complex maneuvers, the stern gate opened and several smaller vessels sailed out to sea. Each carried heavy equipment – including a total of five M41 tanks, two dozen trucks, a bulldozer, a crane and nine tractors. The *San Marcos* immediately returned out to sea while the LSDs moved toward the shore.

Washington, DC, Monday, 17 April 1961, D Day, 2315

Cabell and Bissell raced back to headquarters to report the change in orders. Most critical they had to notify the Brigade of the change. The meeting with Rusk and phone call with the President resulted in a message they regretted having to deliver to the men at WH/4. Bissell threw Cabell to the wolves to deliver the bad news to the task force who diligently worked on the operation for months.

Jack Hawkins echoed many others in the room. "This is criminal negligence." Jake Engler shouted, "This is the damndest thing I ever heard of." Everyone immediately felt overwhelming gloom. They now predicted the worst for the Brigade. No matter how Cabell explained it: "These are our orders, and we have to do what we're told." Jake Esterline admitted he considered strangling a four-star general. The Brigade was doomed.

Washington, DC, and Bay of Pigs, Tuesday, 18 April 1961, D + 1

On his own authority Bissell directed five B-26B missions, four with American crews. Two of the four, piloted by Shannon and Shamberger, had extra fuel tanks and Shannon carried a napalm bomb. They were to target trucks and tanks near the beach. They launched at 0300 and agreed Shannon would head over the target first because he had the napalm. With no chance for survival, Shamberger was shot down over the sea by a FAR T-33. Gonzalo Herrera, the only Brigade pilot who made it successfully to the beach, managed to drop his entire bomb load on the targets.

Washington, DC, Tuesday, 18 April 1961, D + 1, 0600

A letter from the Soviet Foreign Ministry addressed to President Kennedy from Premier Khrushchev was delivered to the US Embassy in Moscow. The US ambassador transmitted it to the State Department which arrived at 0900. The letter read:

> Mr. President, I send you this message in an hour of alarm, fraught with danger for the peace of the whole world. As far as the Soviet Union is concerned, there should be no mistake about our position. We will render the Cuban people and their government all necessary help to repel armed attack on Cuba. The United States will be risking a military catastrophe with its actions.

Wreckage of one of the downed B-26s of the Liberation Air Force, seen being 'inspected' by the Cuban militiamen. (Albert Grandolini Collection)

B-26 Invaders trying to support the landing in the Bay of Pigs encountered not only fierce resistance from the FAR in the air, but also massive volumes of anti-aircraft fire from Cuban troops on the ground. This photograph shows a 12.7mm quadruple-barrel heavy machine gun of Soviet or Czech origin. (Albert Grandolini Collection)

Khrushchev added the "invasion of Cuba could endanger the peaceful life of the population of the United States."

Kennedy believed the Soviet premier would likely retaliate in West Berlin to get more attention from around the world. News reports told of American embassies in Tokyo, New Delhi, Cairo, Belgrade, Warsaw and Mexico City being stoned as demonstrators marched and shouted anti-American slogans. Venezuela condemned the US actions.

Washington, DC, Tuesday, 18 April 1961, D + 1, 0700

Dulles met with the President in the Cabinet Room with MacGeorge Bundy, General Cabell, Richard Bissell, Walt Rostow and Major General Chester Clifton. Dulles reported the operation looked like a disaster. Castro's forces had moved to trap the Brigade on the beach. The President asked only a few questions, but otherwise made no comment. Bundy found it difficult to gauge Kennedy's thoughts.

The Cabinet Room became an emergency command post; the President and his brother, Robert Kennedy passed in and out of the room as those present discussed the maps spread across the table. It was a buzz of activity; questions shouted, and responses barked. Adlai Stevenson required instructions for the UN. Harlan Cleveland drafted the message for the President's approval. Pierre Salinger asked what to tell reporters who waited for an update. Rear Admiral John A. Clark and his staff on the scene with the flotilla in Cuba pressed for more American participation, but the President continued to resist.

At 1330 Admiral Burke called JCS and gave instructions for photographic and visual reconnaissance in unmarked jets from the *Essex* to determine the situation on the beach. Communication

Ships hauling supplies and ammunition for the Brigade were equipped with anti-aircraft guns. This photograph shows one of the latter in action – in response to a FAR air strike. (Albert Grandolini Collection)

between Burke, JCS and the Cabinet Room was slow and difficult to receive updates. At 1930, JCS ordered unmarked C-130 Air Force transports to drop ammunition on the beach that night. Eight B-26Bs readied their crews as reinforcement for the Brigade.

One event after another led the operation on a rapidly moving downhill course. There were not enough pilots available to fly the bombers out of Nicaragua. The C-130s could not have reached the beach until early morning. Reconnaissance jets from the *Essex* reported no fighting on the beach. The Cabinet Room group made the decision there was no reason to go in except to rescue the Brigade.

The President concluded the Bay of Pigs "an incident not a disaster," and he would not be pushed into committing US forces. He had great concern "for the brave men on the beaches, and he wanted to save as many as he could." Time was running out for them, but they needed more than good wishes.

Bay of Pigs, Tuesday, 18 April 1961, D + 1, 1100

Finally, radio contact was established with the *Blagar* and San Roman requested resupply of food, ammunition, medical supplies and communications equipment. Gray Lynch told him all would be delivered that night. Lynch told him they could evacuate the Brigade from the beaches if the situation worsened. San Roman replied firmly: "I will not be evacuated. We will fight until the end if we have to."

Puerto Cabezas, Nicaragua, Tuesday, 18 April 1961, D + 1, 1200

Brigade pilots were exhausted, disgusted and anxious; some aborted their missions. CIA Air Operations Officer, Gar Thorsrud, allowed only two hours' sleep for Ferrer and Soliz before awaking them for a critical mission. The Brigade desperately needed ammunition. Ferrer's flight plan called for a 1400 takeoff and directed him to "land at Giron, keep the engines running during unloading then get the hell out." As Ferrer's plane was being loaded, a Brigade chaplain, Father Cipriano Cavero, told the pilot he wanted to go on the mission.

Ferrer responded, "You're crazy. You can't go." The priest continued to argue until Ferrer thrust a machine gun into his hands, and said, "The only way you can go is if you are willing to fight with this." Father Cavero nodded his agreement, grabbed the gun and quickly climbed aboard the aircraft.

One of the buses destroyed in air strikes of the Liberation Air Force's B-26s on 18 April 1961. (Albert Grandolini Collection)

A pair of T-34/85s and a SU-100 assault gun seen approaching the Bay of Pigs area. (Albert Grandolini Collection)

Soviet-made ZiS-3 guns in action against Brigade 2506. (Albert Grandolini Collection)

flying to Cuba from Nicaragua. Nearing Giron, they spotted a column of trucks and tanks. Six Brigade planes dropped napalm, bombs and rockets destroying seven tanks and 'several hundred Fidelistas'.

Unknown to the Brigade, six B-26B sorties flew on the afternoon of 18 April and attacked Castro vehicles and tanks as they approached Giron from Playa Larga. The Invaders delivered napalm for the first time. The Brigade made it through the remainder of the day without additional action.

Gonzalo Herrera flew across the swamp behind the beachhead barely above the treetops when he heard an American pilot yell distress: "Mad Dog Four! Mad Dog Four! May Day! May Day! T-33 attacking. We are Americans. Help us," the pilot pleaded.

A voice from the *Essex* responded, "I am a naval officer, and I must obey my orders."

As Herrera dove at a line of enemy trucks rolling down the highway, he heard another American B-26B in distress. The call was broken when the aircraft exploded midair. Herrera witnessed the fireball a mile off his right wing. Brigade aircraft also flew that day, some with American CIA pilots. Without President Kennedy's knowledge, Bissell authorized American advisers to fill in for the exile pilots who were already exhausted from six-hour flights.[2]

On 18 April San Roman and Oliva met at Giron to assess their positions. They expected to come under attack at any time by forces from Playa Larga. Everyone was low on ammunition and mortar bombs. If they could hold out until nightfall, they expected resupply by ship or airdrop.

Washington, DC and Bay of Pigs, Tuesday, 18 April 1961, D + 1, 1200

Bissell again unilaterally authorized American pilots to fly combat missions. At 1400 contract pilots, "Peters" and "Seig" joined Brigade pilots Gus Ponzoa, Mario Zuniga, René García and Antonio Soto

At 1800 Castro's artillery began pounding Brigade positions. A Brigade C-54 made a supply drop over Giron airfield, but the wind blew the parachutes into the swamp. Another C-54 made a drop over the beach, but Brigadistas watched in shock as a load of critical supplies blew out to sea. Fortunately, they recovered about

half of both supply drops. During the night of 18 April, San Roman believed the FAR were preparing for an attack on the western front, but the attack did not materialize.

Washington, DC, Tuesday, 18 April 1961, D + 1, 2100

The President and Mrs. Kennedy attended a Congressional Reception in the evening, the first formal event of the administration. This occasion allowed every representative and senator plus their wives to meet the President and First Lady. Even JCS generals in medal-laden formal dress uniforms, attended the gala. Attendees enjoyed hot and cold buffet selections and spiked punch. Most people appeared like they could not wait to leave.

While the President circulated through the crowd shaking hands and joking with the congressmen, his brother, Robert, took Senator George Smathers (Florida) aside. He whispered to the senator, "The shit has hit the fan. This thing has turned sour like you wouldn't believe."

Kenneth O'Donnell, the President's appointment secretary attended at the request of the President. However, O'Donnell returned to the White House to monitor the incoming phone calls. One message from Walt Rostow reported "the operation was going into the shit house and fast." Bissell and Rostow concluded the President had to have the latest information coming from Cuba. They told O'Donnell to schedule a meeting in the Cabinet Room at midnight for the President and key players.

Bissell reported news from Playa Giron, a few hours behind real time, which told of Cubans "dying on the beaches and the Revolutionary Council threatening suicide in Miami." After the grim details, Bissell argued the mission could still be saved but only if the President authorized jets from the *Essex* to shoot down the enemy aircraft." The President's advisers continued to pressure him to authorize military force from awaiting ships.

The President slammed his fist on the table and responded, "Emphatically, no!" Burke then asked for a destroyer to knock out Castro's tanks. Again, with obvious anger, the President said, "I don't want the US involved."

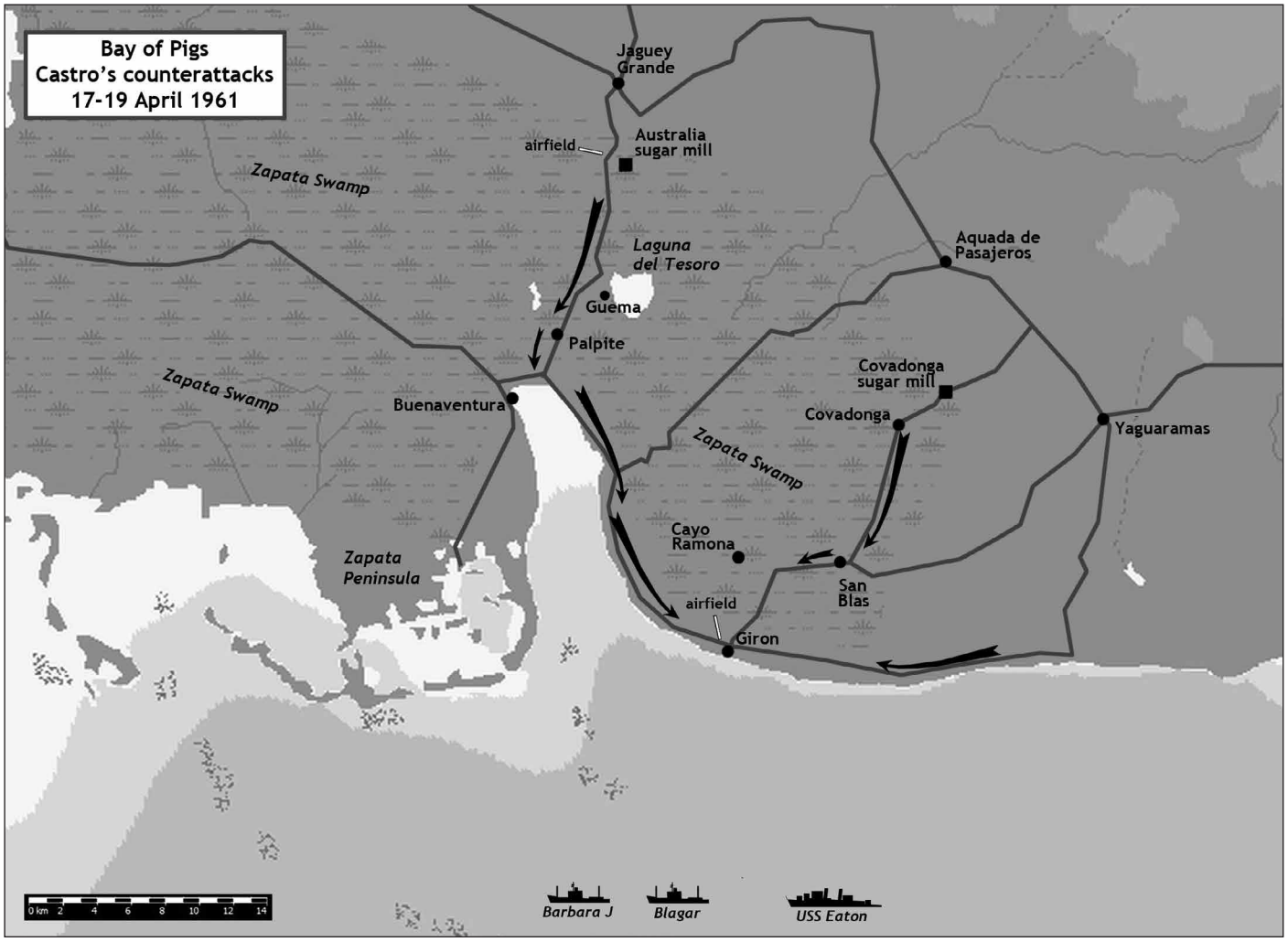
Burke replied with matching anger, "Hell, Mr. President, we are already involved."

Onboard the USS *Essex,* Wednesday, 19 April 1961, D + 2

The Air Operations Officer of the *Essex*, Ed Maddox, like most of the pilots, experienced deep sadness and near tears as he witnessed the situation. From his air operations room, he could hear most radio calls. The Brigade on the beach pleaded repeatedly for help. The commander of the air squadron on the carrier received a strange order: Aircraft numbers and insignia were to be painted out. Mess cooks, bakers and anyone else available joined the paint crew. The result, expressed by the Assistant Air Officer, looked like a six-year-old kid's art project.

En route to Giron, Wednesday, 19 April 1961, D + 2, 0200

Four B-26B Invaders, two piloted by Americans and two by the exiles, took off from Puerto Cabezas at 0200. One of the Brigade's aircraft developed engine trouble and returned to base. The remaining three



The final phase of the battle in the Bay of Pigs, as Castro's forces pushed into the bridgehead of Brigade 2506 from three directions. (Map by Tom Cooper)

A T-34/85 tank and infantrymen moving towards positions of Brigade 2506. (Albert Grandolini Collection)

Castro atop a SU-100 self-propelled assault gun, during the fighting in the Bay of Pigs. (Albert Grandolini Collection)

A knocked out and abandoned T-34/85 tank, seen on the approach to the Bay of Pigs. (Albert Grandolini Collection)

B-26Bs arrived at Giron an hour before the US Navy jets launched and headed to their target. Almost immediately one was shot down, another hit by ground fire and crashed into the sea. Both US Navy aircraft were piloted by American crews. The exile crews' B-26B was damaged by ground fire as it limped back to base with bullet holes in the fuselage and one engine out. This was the last bombing mission flown by the Brigade's Liberation Air Force.

Landing at Giron, Wednesday, 19 April 1961, D + 2, Before Daylight

A Brigade B-26B landed at Giron to deliver bazooka rockets, ammunition, maps and communication equipment. The aircraft could not afford the time to load the wounded men for the return flight to Nicaragua. As the sole remaining Brigade-crewed B-26B left on its last bombing run, the commander believed the attack caused confusion among the Fidelistas. The Commander of Air Operations, Gar Thorsrud, then organized the paratroopers and 3rd Battalion for a counterattack. His boldness paid off and the Fidelistas bolted. However, two tanks reinforced the Brigadistas; they soon ran out of ammunition and retreated.

Washington, DC, Wednesday, 19 April 1961, D + 2, 0700

Alarmed by the news from Giron, President Kennedy still did not want to commit American forces to support the Brigade. However, he agreed to grant one hour escort for Brigade aircraft on 19 April from 0630 to 0730. No one considered the different time zones between Puerto Cabezas and the Bay of Pigs when they factored takeoff times. Another red flag. Alabama Air National Guard officers, Captain Thomas Willard Ray and Captain Leo Francis Baker were killed flying

M41 Walker Bulldog light tanks of the Brigade, seen after being captured by the FAR. (Albert Grandolini Collection)

Cache of abandoned weapons on the beach. (Albert Grandolini Collection)

Brigade weapons abandoned after fighting ceased and collected by the FAR for display to the world's press. (Albert Grandolini Collection)

Brigade B-26Bs on the morning of 19 April.

Over Giron, Wednesday, 19 April 1961, D + 2, 1300

FAR pilot Rafael del Pino launched his T-33 for another attack on Giron. He spotted a cluster of small ships and a US destroyer which appeared to be only 300 feet away (91.44 meters). Del Pino considered the small fleet to be a good target for strafing. The destroyer took no action and sailed away from the beach. Del Pino then climbed out and returned to his base.

Giron, Wednesday, 19 April 1961, D + 2, 1400

Roman Fernandez felt disappointed he failed to take Giron by 1800 on Tuesday, 18 April. Now on Wednesday afternoon, 19 April, as he led 2,000 Fidelistas, the enemy fired on them. Casualties mounted and survivors were exhausted. One of his captains reported sighting large ships, identified as destroyers. Fernandez's troops stood near the beach waiting for orders; they all wanted to fire on the ships. He knew he had to be a responsible officer and make the right call. As he considered his options, he spotted the Cuban Air Force planes attacking the small boats. The destroyers then turned and sailed out to sea.

10

THE LAST STAND

Bay of Pigs, Wednesday, 19 April 1961, D + 2, 1300

Brigade troops showed evident signs of disappointment, desperation, silence, sadness and frustration as they sat in small groups. Some men even avoided looking directly at their fellow soldiers. At Giron, Pepe San Roman, Manuel Artime and Raul Granda boarded a small boat out to sea to search for the ammunition vessels. They were never told the ships had already sailed away from the beach. Oliva suggested the Brigade escape to the mountains, but San Roman said the distance was too great and there were not enough trucks. They would have to travel through areas populated with Castro's forces. Pepe's confidence in the US plan was so strong he believed the Americans would not let them down.

Onboard the *Eaton*, Wednesday, 19 April 1961, D + 2, 1400

Captain Crutchfield talked with San Roman on the small radio, and he believed the Brigade commander sounded even more desperate. The *Eaton* pulled up beside the *Essex* to take on a Marine colonel with a heavy briefcase onboard. Rumors flew around that the briefcase contained bundles of cash if the Cubans needed that kind of persuasion. Pilots from the *Essex* flew close to Castro's planes and begged to shoot. Crutchfield felt rage that the US brought the Brigade here and abandoned them with Castro's troops breathing down their necks.

Jets from the *Essex* spotted the fleeing *Atlantico* and *Caribe* with loads of ammunition critically needed onshore. The crew of the *Eaton* spotted their tanker, refueled quietly and sailed on. En route to the island, they met the *Atlantico* which had turned back to the beach to deliver their ammunition cargo. Garcia, while apologetic for not responding to the *Eaton's* messages, told the colonel, "When you have a partner, you don't change the rules without telling him." After he heard the colonel's explanation, Garcia agreed to turn back.

Onboard the *Blagar,* Wednesday, 19 April 1961, D + 2, 0200

Gray Lynch read a puzzling message from Headquarters. The message read: "The Navy has been authorized to remove the Brigade from the beaches." Why talk about the evacuation now? The ammunition from the *Atlantico* and *Caribe* was expected to arrive soon, and wounded troops would be airlifted out from Giron. It was a very confusing message to send to San Roman.

Brigade pilot Gonzalo Herrera witnessed the San Blas front appear like a busy ant hill. He targeted Castro's forces north of the city, strafing them and dropping two napalm bombs. Pepe's brother, Roberto San Roman, helped Alejandro del Valle, commander of the paratroopers switch a threatened front into a slow retreat. Castro's tanker fired directly into the Brigade positions. Forty Brigade men commandeered an abandoned truck. The last of the San Blas front began a long trek back to the remains of Giron, now in smoke and flames.

Radio Havana broadcast an official government report: "Our anti-aircraft batteries brought down a US military plane piloted by Leo Francis Bell of Boston, Massachusetts."

Gray received a radio message onboard the *Blagar* that said: "Four unmarked jets en route to arrive over the beach in 45 minutes." The Eaton relayed another message from the Essex: "Pepe San Roman to report immediately when he saw the jets."

Fidel declaring victory at the Provincial Palace in Havana. (Albert Grandolini Collection)

Gray radioed Pepe, "Jets on the way."

Pepe replied, "They just passed over us."

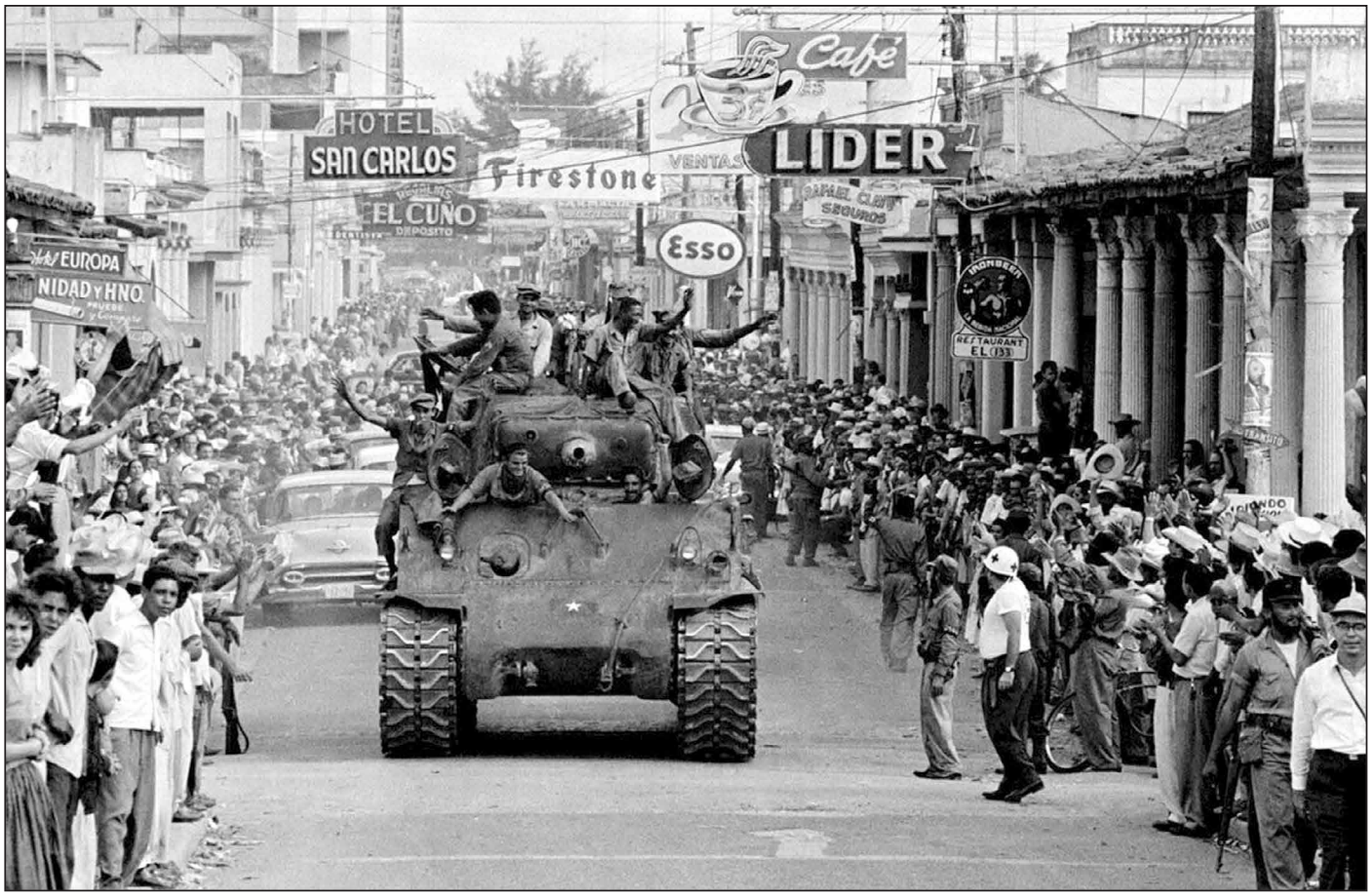
"Which way did they go?"

Alarmed, Pepe yelled, "We are being attacked by Sea Furies."

If the Brigade men had seen the small radio room on the *Blagar,* their confidence would have hit rock bottom. Yet it was Bissell's command post and Gray had become the unauthorized leader in charge of the operation. Oliva organized the Brigade's last stand at Giron. He had seven bazookas which proved to be a challenge against Castro's tanks. Oliva positioned three of the Brigade tanks at the curve along the road to Playa Larga. Castro's tanks were no match for Oliva's bazookas and tanks, and they hastily retreated. Oliva tried to reach Pepe at Giron, but he did not know the Bay of Pigs battle had already ended.

San Roman heard the approaching T-33s and realized the Brigade could not continue. At 1430, Pepe sent a last message to Gray: "Am destroying all equipment and communication. I have nothing left to fight with. I am taking to the woods. I can't wait for you."

Oliva searched for San Roman in Giron, but the commander had already departed. Abandoned tanks, equipment and machine guns littered the beach. A group of men wandered aimlessly. Oliva gathered the remaining men and headed east toward Cienfuegos.



Cubans celebrating with a tank parade in Havana, on 1 May 1961. Visible is an M4 Sherman. (Albert Grandolini Collection)

Soviet MiG-21 pilots pose with a retired FAR T-33 in 1962: serial number 711 was the most successful of the FAR's jets during the fighting in the Bay of Pigs. (Albert Grandolini Collection).

Onboard the *Blagar,* Gray and Rip could not reach anyone for a status on the air support. They decided to take the LCUs to the beach and unload the ammunition. Before they launched, they radioed Headquarters and politely "suggested some kind of air support" if Washington wanted to save the ships. The response was negative. Washington obviously did not want its ships or aircraft involved in the action.

Captain Searcy onboard the *Eaton* tried three times to "ask if there was a change in the rules of combat," and three times he had been denied. Searcy said, "It's just too cold-blooded and brutal to say 'Okay, fellows, this isn't working, goodbye now.'" Even with Gray's messages from the *Blagar* and Artime's messages of encouragement, Pepe San Roman felt resigned the end was near.

Two Sea Furies and a T-33A strafed Oliva's line and men fled to the swamps. This signaled the last battle of the Bay of Pigs.

The USS *Eaton* sailed toward the beaches to assess the situation. There was no sign of anyone from Brigade 2506.

As Castro's tanks rolled in, Brigade troops ran out of ammunition with no resupply ships in sight.

All communications between Gray and Pepe ceased. The last rockets, bombs and ammunition had been spent. The battle had ended.

11

THE END … ALMOST

The guns, bombs and rockets may have been silenced, but to the Brigade survivors, it was only the beginning of more devastating days to come. While hundreds died in the invasion, more fled to the swamps, sick, hungry and hopeless. Castro's militia began the search for any remaining stragglers regardless of condition.

Washington, DC, Thursday, 20 April 1961, D + 3

Arthur Schlesinger and Adolph Berle advised the President the CRC in Florida had threatened suicide, and they were angry with the CIA. Kennedy told Schlesinger and Berle to get to Miami and "settle them down."

Opa Locka, Florida, Thursday, 20 April 1961, D + 3

Schlesinger and Berle departed for Miami and Bundy left to catch a flight to New York. All were on hand-holding missions, Bundy to meet with Stevenson.

Schlesinger and Berle landed in Miami at 0700 and were met by Gerry Droller/Frank Bender and former Havana Chief of Station James Noel. The four men arrived at the Opa Locka Air Base and went by car to the barracks guarded by armed soldiers. Inside the six members of the CRC greeted the Americans amiably.

Although the CRC had little information, they understood the situation in Cuba to be dismal. They were anxious and discouraged, even tearful. The situation was emotional and confrontational. Tony Varona threatened to leave Opa Locka and hold a press conference. Jose Miro Cardona demanded the Council be flown to Cuba to be with the Brigade.

Following a discussion away of CRC hearing, Schlesinger and Berle determined this was a situation only the President could resolve. Schlesinger called the Oval Office and told the President, "We can't do anything else here." Kennedy replied immediately, "Bring them here."

Washington, DC, Thursday, 20 April 1961, D + 3

In the early morning, Americans read newspaper headlines that announced: "Invasion Crushed, Castro Reports Exiles Wiped Out, Invaders Admit Tragic Losses." *The New York Times* journalist, C. L. Sulzberger wrote that day: "We look fools to our friends, rascals to our enemies and incompetents to the rest."

Schlesinger and Berle arrived at Washington National Airport at 1600 with the six members of the CRC and drove directly to the White House. A small reception had been prepared for them on the second floor where they were offered sandwiches and coffee. At 1700 the group entered the Oval Office where the President greeted the group. McGeorge Bundy, Walt Rostow, Dean Rusk and John Plank, a professor in Latin American studies and fluent in Spanish joined the group to translate the discussions.

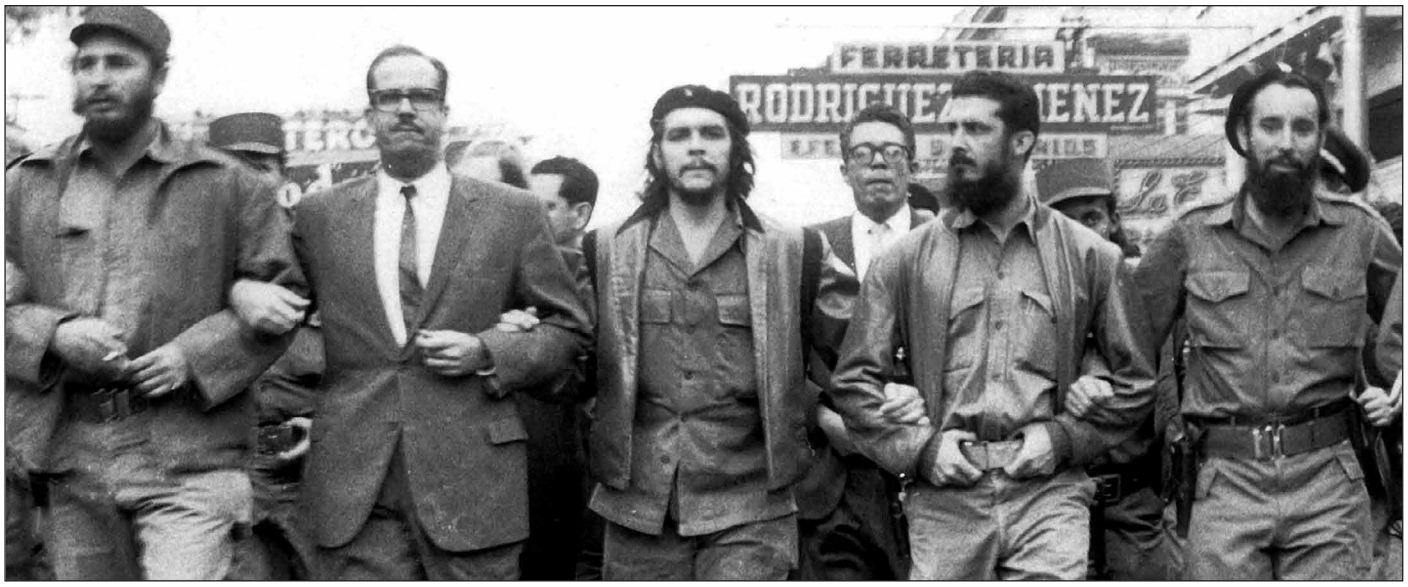
As Kennedy attempted to console the CRC, the men of WH/4 task force predicted this outcome when the second air strikes were cancelled on 16 April. Each of the men experienced his disappointment, most with deep emotion and frustration. David Phillips sent messages to Radio Swan. Tracy Barnes, usually cheerful, showed little emotion. Richard Bissell expressed cool declaration: "We've done all we can. Why don't we all go home and get some sleep."

Caribbean, Thursday and Friday, 20 – 21 April 1961

Onboard the *Blagar,* Gray Lynch and his frogmen, Cantillo, Soto and Casares, sailed the sea south of Cuba. Rip Robertson and his frogmen, Pruna, Bentancourt and Font, cruised a nearby area. A message from Washington for Gray and Rip directed them to transfer with their frogmen crews to the *Santiago* which sailed them to the carrier *Essex* for a mission planning meeting. The message confirmed by Agency Director, Allen Dulles, requested them to mount a rescue of survivors in a "humanitarian effort". Onboard the *Essex,* Gray and Rip were briefed showing aerial photos of the area to be mainly swamp for 12 miles around the destroyed *Houston.* US Navy aircraft had spotted survivors of the *Houston* and the 5th Battalion west of the Bay of Pigs. All available ships and aircraft had been authorized to mobilize as quickly as possible. Gray and Rip loaded their UDT rafts with weapons, radios, water and gear to save as many Brigadistas as possible.

Washington, DC, Friday, 21 April 1961, D + 4

Kennedy addressed the American Society of Newspaper Editors, the same group Castro met with two years earlier. The President's speechwriter, Theodore Sorensen, had a tall order: The speech had to reassure American allies that the nation had good intentions and was not about to trigger a war. He had to signal to allies and adversaries alike he would not allow the US to be pushed around. After reassuring the newspapermen and women, the US would never engage in unilateral intervention, Kennedy stated "but our restraint is not inexhaustible. We intend to profit from this lesson. Let me make clear as the President of the United States that I am determined upon our system's survival and success, regardless of the cost and regardless of the peril."



Arms linked, Fidel, far left, and Che Guevara, center, march with arms linked through the streets. (Albert Grandolini Collection)

Bay of Pigs, Friday, 21 April 1961, D + 4

Shortly before dawn, Gray, Rip and their crews moved close by the *Houston.* Navy jets circled over the bay to ward off any of Castro's aircraft should they appear. They moved their rafts into the shore, flying a US flag hoping the survivors would spot it and come out of the swamps. They later learned that some survivors had spotted the flags but thought it a Castro trick to bring them out. Survivors had been in the swamps for over a week and were exhausted. When the *Santiago* moved out of the bay, the first survivors waved frantically. Five men, crying with relief, swam out to meet the rafts.

After the first rescue, no others came out. They returned to the *Santiago* to deliver their survivors before returning to the beach. Gray's and Rip's teams walked the beaches looking for footprints without success.

Before dawn Saturday, 22 April, the groups returned to continue their search. More Navy aircraft had joined the quest and flew at an altitude barely over the sea. Finally, the pilots discovered a group of pitiful men, in pairs, groups of three or four, and even one man alone. The airplanes radioed to the *Santiago* which in turn notified Gray and Rip by radio to pick up the spotted men. Survivors were taken to the destroyers and given medical attention while the rescue teams returned for more. The longer the Brigadistas were in the swamp, the more dire their condition, some completely naked, cuts from head to feet. Many had severe lacerations from the coral. All the Brigadistas were provided survival training, but only one group recalled enough instruction to be found in good condition. Many of that group still had their weapons, canteens, clothing and boots.

Gray's and Rip's teams were not the only ones searching for the survivors; Castro's Soviet-built helicopters circled the swamps shooting desperate survivors with machine guns. If the situation was not bad enough, Castro sent two Sea Furies down on the beach which turned out to be a mistake. A force of US Navy jet fighters escorted the Sea Furies the length of the bay, boxing them in above and below. The leader of the Navy fighter group radioed to ask if they were permitted to "dump" the Sea Furies. He was told if the Sea Furies dropped below 5,000 feet and came within five miles of the destroyers, he could act. Much to the leader's disappointment, the Sea Furies turned away.

Playa Giron, Friday, 21 April 1961, D + 4

Since Wednesday, 19 April, surviving Brigadistas clung to life. Hundreds died in the invasion, and hundreds more hid in the swamps, sick, hungry and anxious. Some men succumbed to their wounds, some floated on anything they found out to sea hoping for rescue by American ships. Castro's troops hunted them liked animals. Brigadistas still hiding in the swamp when found were marched back to Playa Giron where a prison camp awaited complete with media circus.

At Giron photographers and reporters from many countries surrounded Castro. He enjoyed the media attention and the photographic opportunity as he interrogated prisoners. Castro basked in the limelight as he pumped up his heroic story of defeat of America. Fidel Castro enjoyed the post-invasion spotlight. He conducted tours for journalists at Giron; he delivered passionate speeches and sealed his position as the supreme leader of Cuba. The ideals he professed in his speech in New York two years earlier: Free elections and freedom of the press became unimportant when the opportunity for self-esteem rose to the top of the agenda. At the end of the day, as the US feared, Cuba had become a Communist dictatorship.

Washington, DC, Friday, 21 April 1961, D + 4

As agencies of the US government pointed fingers of blame for the Bay of Pigs failure, the Brigade men who volunteered and participated in the mission endured their imprisonment in Havana. Forced to sit for hours on hard benches in the sports arena, the Brigadistas were also forbidden to stand or stretch. For only a few hours a day, they had permission to lay down on the hot ground. With nowhere to bathe, hygiene became impossible. Bathroom breaks under the watchful eyes of the guards were infrequent. The once proud Brigadistas even continued to wear the same uniforms caked with dirt, sweat and blood.

Havana, Monday, 24 April 1961, D + 7

Rather than execute all the Brigadistas, Castro believed them to be worth more alive, and wisely he feared American retaliation if the prisoners were killed. His prisons already overflowed with counterrevolutionaries and little space for one thousand more. Castro then sent them to the *Palacio de Esportes* (Sports Palace) in Havana. The militia captured Pepe San Ramon on 25 April when he

walked into a patrol unit. He fully expected to be executed when his captors learned his identity. They dragged him into the arena to join hundreds of other Brigadistas. Castro made a grand entrance on 26 April complete with photographers to interrogate the prisoners for hours on local television.

Weeks later the militia transferred prisoners to a naval hospital in Havana. They had cots to sleep on, showers, fresh clothes and better food. Rumors circulated Castro had planned to make a deal for their release. Obviously, Castro had a plan, and it would have better chances of success if the men were in good condition.

Havana, Tuesday, 17 May 1961

In a speech to farmers, Castro told them he planned to trade Brigade prisoners for 500 tractors.

Kennedy thought of the prisoners frequently and felt guilt for their plight. He said, "They trusted me, and they are in prison now because I fucked up. I have to get them out." The US no longer recognized Cuba and therefore could not negotiate. Kennedy designated a group of citizens outside government: Milton Eisenhower (brother of former president Dwight Eisenhower); former First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt and Walter Reuther, President of United Auto Workers Union. Their task would be to raise funds to exchange tractors for the prisoners. The President left the committee to develop the plan and to absorb political heat that might come with it.

The committee did come under fire from Republicans and Democrats alike who believed the group had been set up to comply with Castro's blackmail.[1] Citizen letters directed to committee members criticized them of surrendering to Communist demands. In response, Castro demanded he did not just want any tractor, he only wanted Caterpillar bulldozers. One US citizen wrote to his congressman and said, "When Nikita remarked that he would bury us, I did not think we would have to supply the equipment."

The committee and Castro argued over a period of weeks about the interpretation of tractors. Eisenhower and his team considered the request for tractors to mean farm tractors valued at approximately $17 million USD. On 23 June 1961 the committee sent a "final offer" cable to Castro offering the 500 farm tractors. Castro responded he would not accept the deal. As a result, the committee disbanded, contributions returned to donors and prisoners remained in Cuba.

Vienna, 3 June 1961

The Vienna Summit between Kennedy and Khrushchev had been planned early in the year, shortly after the January inauguration. Kennedy greeted Khrushchev on the steps of the US Embassy. Photographers captured the handshake of the two leaders for transmission around the world.

When the leaders met away from crowds and photographers, Khrushchev quickly took the lead and chastised the US for its fear of Communism and Castro. Kennedy respectfully admitted the invasion had been a mistake, but a Communist Cuba only 90 miles from the US was intolerable. When the second day ended, the President felt he had been chastised like a schoolboy. Khrushchev revealed another potential headache for Kennedy that he intended to sign an agreement with Germany to block access by the West to Berlin.

Washington, DC and East/West Berlin, August 1961

As Khrushchev threatened, the Communists began construction of a wall between West Berlin and East Germany. Kennedy knew the Berlin Wall could be considered grounds for retaliation, but he understood Khrushchev had offered an olive branch. The wall would prevent East Germans from racing to West Berlin. However, the wall did not close off West Berlin to the US. With that in mind, Kennedy believed he could live with it.

Montevideo, Uruguay, August 1961

Removal of Fidel Castro from Cuba remained a goal of President Kennedy. Interestingly, Castro appeared open to resolving tensions between the two countries. Richard Goodwin, a Kennedy aide, attended the Alliance for Progress Conference in Montevideo, Uruguay. Che Guevarra also attended the conference and observed Goodwin across the room enjoying a cigar. Both men had attended a birthday celebration in an apartment in Montevideo. Che congenially sent Goodwin a mahogany box filled with Havanas premium cigars. They were introduced and Che indicated he would like a private conversation. Goodwin said he would be happy to listen, but he had no authority to discuss anything on behalf of the US. There had been no reason for Goodwin to speak. Che told Goodwin that Cuba would not establish alliance with Eastern Bloc countries and would not initiate revolution elsewhere in Latin America. Of course, there were conditions. He asked the US to agree to lift the trade embargo and halt plans to overthrow Castro's government. Goodwin and Che bid each other farewell at 0600. While each man maintained his own mindset for the future, Goodwin later wrote: "As we sat together in a small sitting room of a shabby Montevideo apartment, I could sense shared passions fruitlessly struggling to cross the barrier of irreconcilable loyalties and beliefs."

When Goodwin returned to Washington, DC, he was coincidentally appointed by the President to participate on a task force with the objective to overthrow Fidel Castro.

Havana, Cuba, Castillo del Principe, March 1962

After months of delays, Castro began the trial, 11 months after the Bay of Pigs invasion. The trial took place in the courtyard of the Castillo del Principe, a two-hundred-year-old fortress, but it was now far from royal as the name implied.[2] A five-man board of judges convened the proceedings. The once proud Brigadistas now sat on chairs under the blazing sun facing the judges.

One by one, the prisoners refused to testify. When Pepe San Ramon was called, he replied in a strong voice, "*Me abstengo*" (I abstain). The judges sentenced the prisoners to 30 years hard labor. A payment referred to as an "indemnification" could be considered to overturn the sentence. The price of the indemnification depended on rank and position. For example, San Ramon, Artime and Oliva would bring $500,000 USD each. From there in descending order the price went to $100,000 USD, down to as little as $25,000 USD for a total of $62 million USD.

Washington, DC, New York City, Havana, July 1962.

The Cuban Families Committee (CFC) founded in the summer of 1961 had not forgotten their men. Enrique (Harry) Ruiz-Williams, Alvaro Sanchez, Junior and Berta Barreto, were parents of a prisoner or former prisoner. Harry Ruiz-Williams, born in Cuba and educated in the US, opposed Fulgencio Batista. Ruiz-Williams had provided Che Guevarra with trucks, tractors and food. He traveled to Washington, DC in June 1962 as a representative of the CFC to meet with Robert Kennedy, the President's brother. Ruiz-Williams explained the difficulty the committee had experienced raising funds to ransom their family members. However, he understood the US could not directly negotiate a release of the Brigade men and certainly could not pay for their release.

The Attorney General did offer some free legal advice, and he spoke of a need to have someone to represent the committee, someone who knew how to deal with Castro. He believed that man was James B. (Jim) Donovan, a New York attorney and shrewd negotiator. Several months earlier, Donovan had successfully arranged the prisoner exchange between the Soviet Union and the US. Rudolph Abel, a Soviet spy and Francis Gary Powers, a US U-2 spy plane pilot had been held in the US and Soviet Union, respectively. Powers was shot down over the Soviet territory and sentenced in a spectacle trial. In addition, former Yale University student Frederick Pryor was accused of spying and imprisoned in the Soviet Union. With negotiation skills of Jim Donovan, the Powers-Able exchange took place on the Glienicke Bridge in Berlin on a freezing January morning. Pryor was released at another location at the same time.

New York City, 20 June 1962

Members of the CFC met with Donovan at his office and explained their reason for requesting his help. They told him they had no money to pay him; Donovan told his visitors he would represent them *pro bono* (without charge).

Washington, DC, 2 July 1962

James Donovan traveled to Washington DC and met with Robert Kennedy to secure assurances no US law would be violated by his participation. The Attorney General assured Donovan the President supported his endeavor and wished him success. It would then be considered a "private humanitarian effort."

Donovan prepared for the meeting with Castro as he did for any trial or negotiation, by studying books about Castro and his speeches, and news articles about the Bay of Pigs operation. He also studied the negotiations of the Tractors for Freedom and determined why the plan failed.

Havana, August 1962

At the end of August 1962, Jim Donovan and Alvaro Sanchez Jr., President of the CFC, traveled to Cuba to meet Castro. The CIA had given Donovan money for expenses and communications support. Berta Barreto, in-country representative of the CFC, organized the meeting between Donovan and Castro. She also arranged accommodations for Donovan and Sanchez in Havana at her own villa.

Donovan met Castro on 31 August at the Presidential Palace. They talked for four hours, and Donovan spoke with the aid of a prepared list of topics: Hospitality and honor by the visit; mention of his Irish heritage; private citizen and no motives.

Donovan said the $62 million USD was out of the question. Not only was it impossible to raise such a large sum, but it was also not politically feasible for a private group to do so. A more practical method of payment would be for food as a humanitarian aid. Products such as skim milk, lard, canned fruit, soybeans, corn seed oil and poultry. Donovan reminded Castro he could use the food products for propaganda or he could use it commercially. When Donovan finished explaining the CFC offer, Castro lit a cigar and waited. Castro then ranted about the damage the invasion caused his country, and he railed against US leaders. Donovan wisely remained silent and believed Castro would come around. Finally, Castro agreed to accept the food and medical products that totaled $59 million USD. Castro still wanted $2.9 million USD as compensation for care of the injured men already released. Alvaro Sanchez sat throughout the exchange silent but amazed how much had already been accomplished. The following day, Donovan and Castro met again for two hours to work out the details of their agreement. Back in New York, Donovan received Castro's wish list. In late October 1962, it all came to a sudden halt when a cloud again descended between the US and Cuba which became known as the Cuban Missile Crisis.

The US participation in the Bay of Pigs conflict haunted the country for years to come. Four American presidents were touched by the conflict: Dwight Eisenhower, Richard Nixon, John Kennedy and Lyndon Johnson. Intelligent people involved in the organization and planning to remove Castro never considered that it might have been possible to tolerate him, and it never occurred to them that Castro's reign would outlast the administrations of 10 US presidents. In the early 1960s, Americans were almost paranoid about Communism, and the thought of Castro being only 90 miles off the US coast intolerable. The US Senate in 1975 documented at least eight CIA sponsored assassination attempts against Fidel Castro between 1960 – 1965.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Carradice, Phil, *Bay of Pigs: CIA's Cuban Disaster, April 1961* (Barnsley: Pen & Sword Books, 2018)
Chomsky, Aviva, *A History of the Cuban Revolution* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2011)
Coleman, Leycester, *The Real Fidel Castro* (London: Lume Books, 2014)
DeQuesada, Alejandro, *The Bay of Pigs, Cuba 1961* (Oxford: Osprey Publishing, 2009)
Dabrowski, Krzysztof, *Air War Over Cuba 1956 – 1959* (ACIG. Org, 30 November 2011)
Lynch, Grayston, *Decision for Disaster: Betrayal at the Bay of Pigs* (Washington, DC: Potomac Books, 2009)
Maltz, Leora, Ed., *American History by Era, Volume 8: The Cold War Period 1945 – 1992* (New York: Greenhaven Press, 2003)
Rasenberger, Jim, *The Brilliant Disaster* (New York: Scribner, 2011)

NOTES

Chapter 1

1 The Monroe Doctrine stated intervention in the politics of the Americas by foreign powers was potentially a hostile act against the US.
2 The Platt Amendment passed as part of the 1901 Army Appropriations Bill. It listed seven conditions for withdrawal of US troops in Cuba after the Spanish American War.

Chapter 2

1 Ambassador Wells is credited with the overthrow of Machado by encouraging politicians and army officers to lead a mutiny of the soldiers. Their leader, Fulgencio Batista, assumed the presidency and was recognized by the US.
2 After revolutionary forces unseated Batista on 1 January 1959, the yacht *Granma* was transferred to Havana Bay. Norberto Collado Abreu who had served as the helmsman for the 1956 voyage, received the job of guarding and preserving the yacht. Since 1976, the yacht has been on permanent display in a glass enclosure at the *Granma* Memorial adjacent to the Museum of the Revolution in Havana. A portion of the old Oriente Province where the expedition made landfall, was renamed Granma Province in honor of the vessel. UNESCO has declared a World Heritage Site at the Landing of the Granma National Park at the Playa Las Colorados.
3 Although the war had ended, the real revolution was about to begin. The Cuban revolution refers to the "50-year process of consciously creating a new society with many phases, twists and turns.

Chapter 3

1 Castro appealed to the masses and said there were at least six million people listening to his speech that day. Six million was the total population of Cuba at that time.
2 In addition to the naval base, the US operates the Guantanamo Bay Detention Camp which houses prisoners of the Iraq/Afghanistan wars. US Treasury has issued Cuba a check to "lease" the area for $4,085 a year, though at the time of this writing only a single check has been cashed. President Barack Obama and President Raul Castro met on 11 April 2015 and discussed several topics, one of which was Guantanamo Bay Naval Base. State Department documents include all uncashed checks returned by Cuba. Freedom of Information Act declares the US in default of the lease agreement which states Guantanamo is to be used only as a refueling station for Navy vessels.
3 The CIA knew the drug LSD had been in experimental stages.
4 For a fuller account of the development of the U-2 and its operations with the CIA see *We Were Never There* (Warwick, Helion & Company, 2021) in the Europe@War series.

Chapter 5

1 It was quite probable that John Foster Dulles stood to lose a considerable amount of personal funds based on his association with United Fruit Company.

Chapter 6

1 In an interview on 10 September 1963, Eisenhower insisted there was no tactical or operational plan while he occupied the White House. Technically, he was correct.
2 In the early 1830s the island was named Caldez's Island, Toampe and Josepha. Records indicate that Jose Caldez, who had operated a fishing camp on the island, called it Josepha's when he sold it in 1833. The name Useppa first appeared on a hydrological chart of the area in 1855.
3 Although Howard Hughes and Robert Maheu spoke by phone several times a day, they never met face to face.
4 After entering service in the US Army Aviation Corps, the B-26B earned the reputation of "widowmaker" due to the high accident rate on takeoff and landing.
5 The Secretary of the Army Wilbur Brucker said he understood he was authorized to release the sergeants, but it did not mean he was "directed" to do it.

Chapter 8

1 A sound-powered telephone is a communication device that allows users to talk to each other with the use of a handset, similar to a conventional telephone, but without the use of external power.
2 In a later mission, Rip and 17 armed Cuban exiles landed in the Congo on 22 November 1964 to support Colonel Mike Hoare to put down the Congolese Rebels.

Chapter 9

1 The International System of Signals and codes is used by naval vessels to communicate messages regarding safety or other important information. Signals can be sent by flags, signal lamps, radiotelegraphy and radiotelephony.
2 President Kennedy did not learn for two years that four American pilots had been shot down and killed in the Bay of Pigs Operation.

Chapter 11

1 The Logan Act enacted by the 5th US Congress on 30 January 1799 prohibited American citizens from negotiating with foreign governments having a dispute with the United States. The act prevented unauthorized negotiations from undermining the government position.
2 Castillo del Principe is now a military fort in Havana. It has been designated UNESCO World Heritage site, along with other locations in Old Havana.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

A native Texan, Linda was born in Del Rio. Linda retired from the U. S. Government in 1997, after being employed in various occupations during her 33 years Civil Service career, in which she worked in various locations, including the Laughlin AFB, Charleston Naval Base, USAF HQ Europe, Wiesbaden, Germany, NASA, and the Internal Revenue Service in Houston. She has previously written *Flight of the Dragon*, detailing the story of Chang-di 'Robin' Yeh, a Taiwanese U-2 pilot, and *Remembering the Dragon Lady*, first-person memoirs of many of the pilots, specialists and family members who supported the early US spy-plane projects.